



FINEST HOUR



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FINEST HOUR

TO THE VAST MAJORITY OF SERVICEMEN, THE WAR WAS A GRIM, GRUELLING STRUGGLE AGAINST RELENTLESS NAZI OPPRESSION . . .



. . . BUT THERE WAS A HANDFUL OF MEN WHO VIEWED THE WAR AS AN UNRIVALLED OPPORTUNITY FOR CHALLENGING EXCITEMENT . . . MEN LIKE FLYING OFFICER THORNTON.

Chapter 1. *Trigger-Happy*

SOUTHERN ENGLAND 1940. THE HEIGHT OF THAT PART OF THE WAR KNOWN AS THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN. ONCE MORE POUNDING BOOTS ECHOED THE SHRILL URGENCY OF THE SCRAMBLE SIREN. FORCING THEIR TIRED BODIES ACROSS THE TARMAC, THE FIGHTER PILOTS MADE FOR THEIR SLEEK, POWERFUL FIGHTERS...

TWO MINUTES TO GET AIRBORNE!

MUCH MORE OF THIS AND WE'LL BE ASLEEP ON OUR FEET!



WHILE FLYING OFFICER PINDER CONTEMPLATED THE COMING ENCOUNTER NERVOUSLY, HIS OTHER PILOTS WERE READY TO FLY... ATTACK... AND KILL!

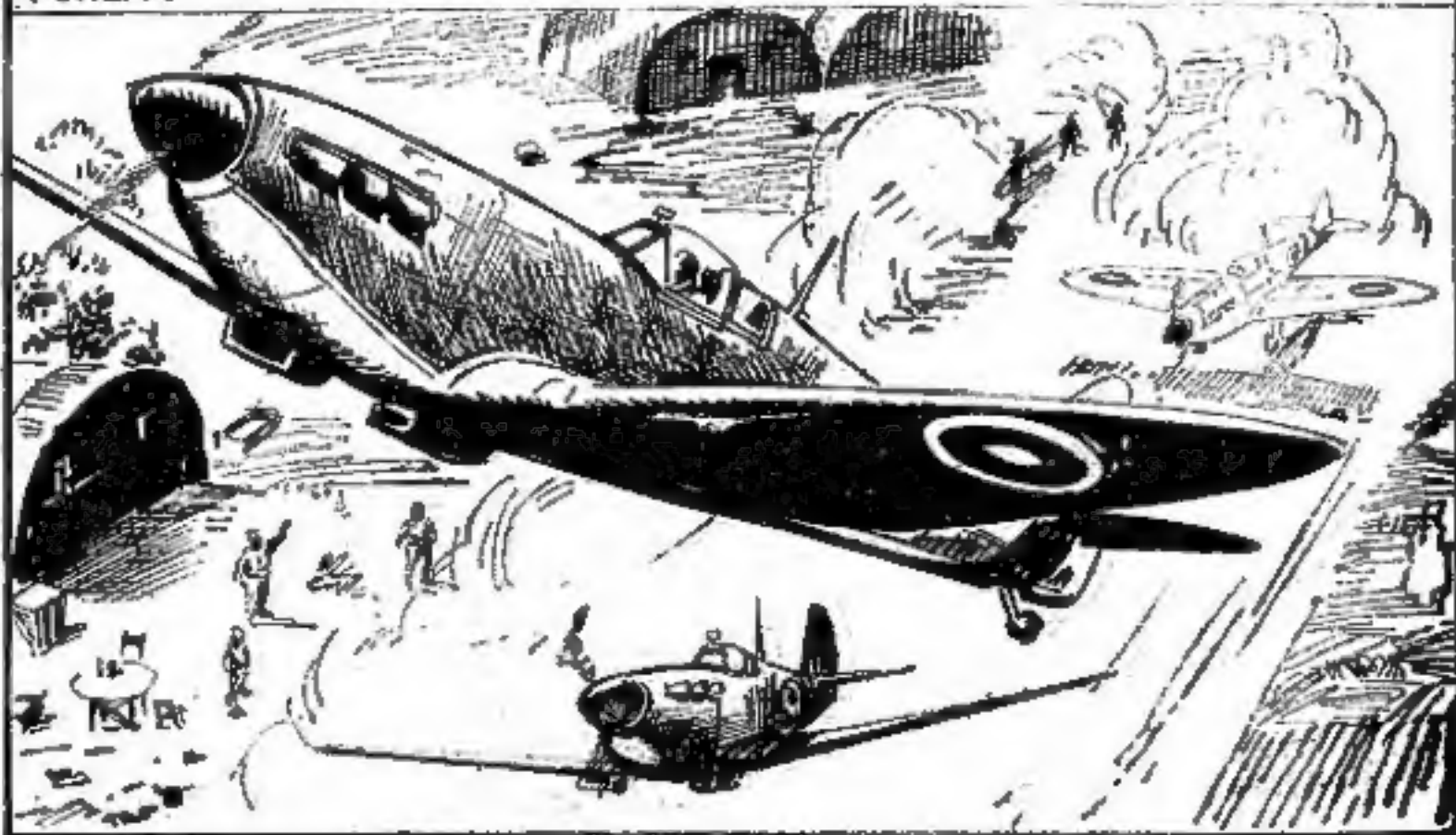
GOOD HUNTING, SIR!

I'M GOING TO GET MY FIFTH TODAY!

I WISH I FELT THAT CONFIDENT...

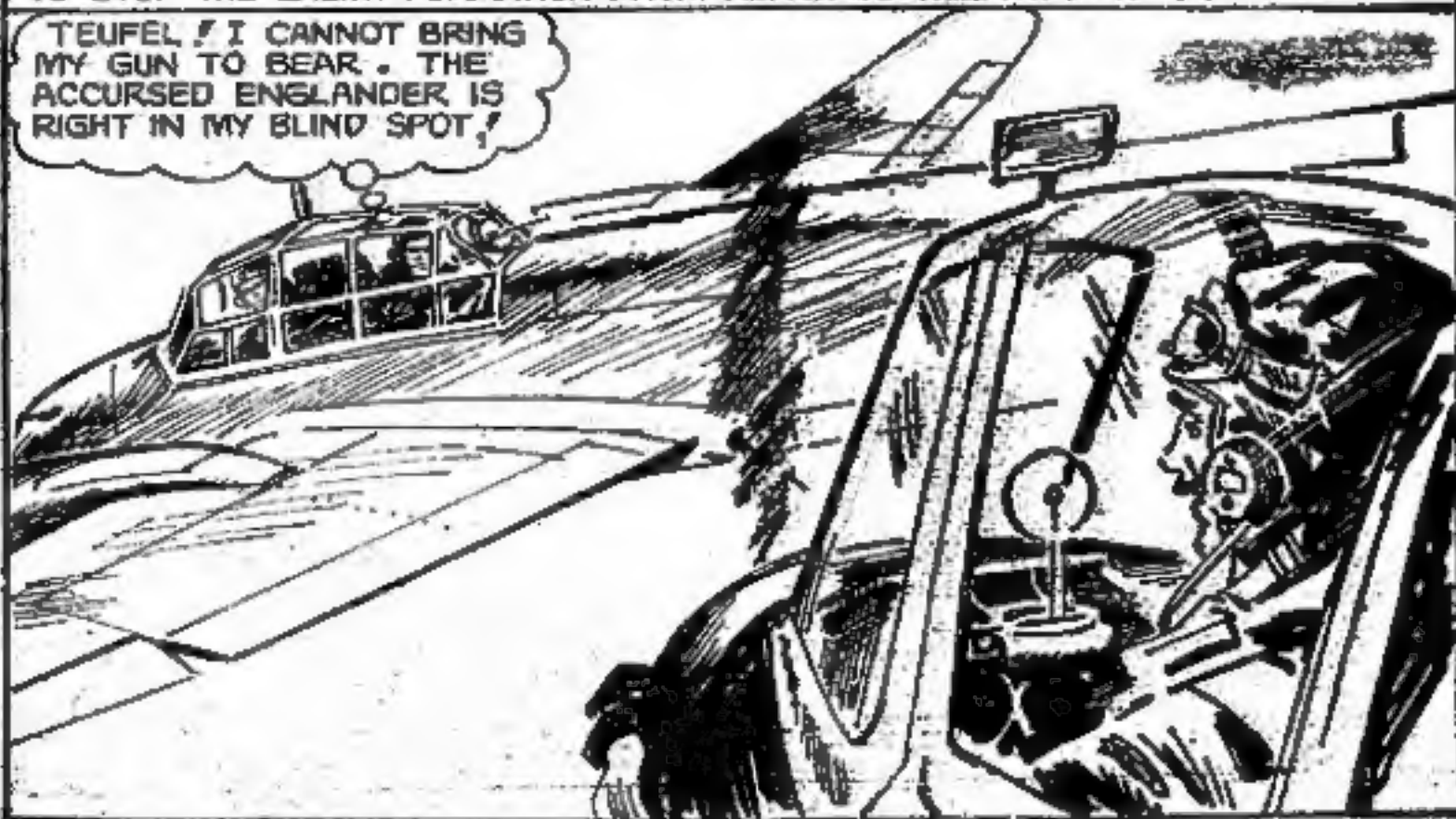


AS THE SWIRLING DUST CLOAKED THE WATCHING GROUND CREWS, THE SQUADRON SCREAMED UP INTO THE CLEAR SKY, THEIR MERLIN ENGINES ROARING AT FULL POWER.



BUZZING ROUND THE GERMAN JUNKERS EIGHTY-EIGHTS LIKE A SWARM OF ANGRY HORNETS, THE SPITFIRES SWOOPED AND DIED IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO STOP THE ENEMY FORMATION FROM REACHING THEIR TARGET...

TEUFEL! I CANNOT BRING MY GUN TO BEAR. THE ACCURSED ENGLANDER IS RIGHT IN MY BLIND SPOT!



BUT JUST AS THORNTON'S THUMB RESTED ON THE FIRING BUTTON, A HARSH, RASPING VOICE CUT IN OVER HIS EARPHONES...

PINDER'S IN TROUBLE, THORNTON. BREAK OFF AND GIVE HIM A HAND!

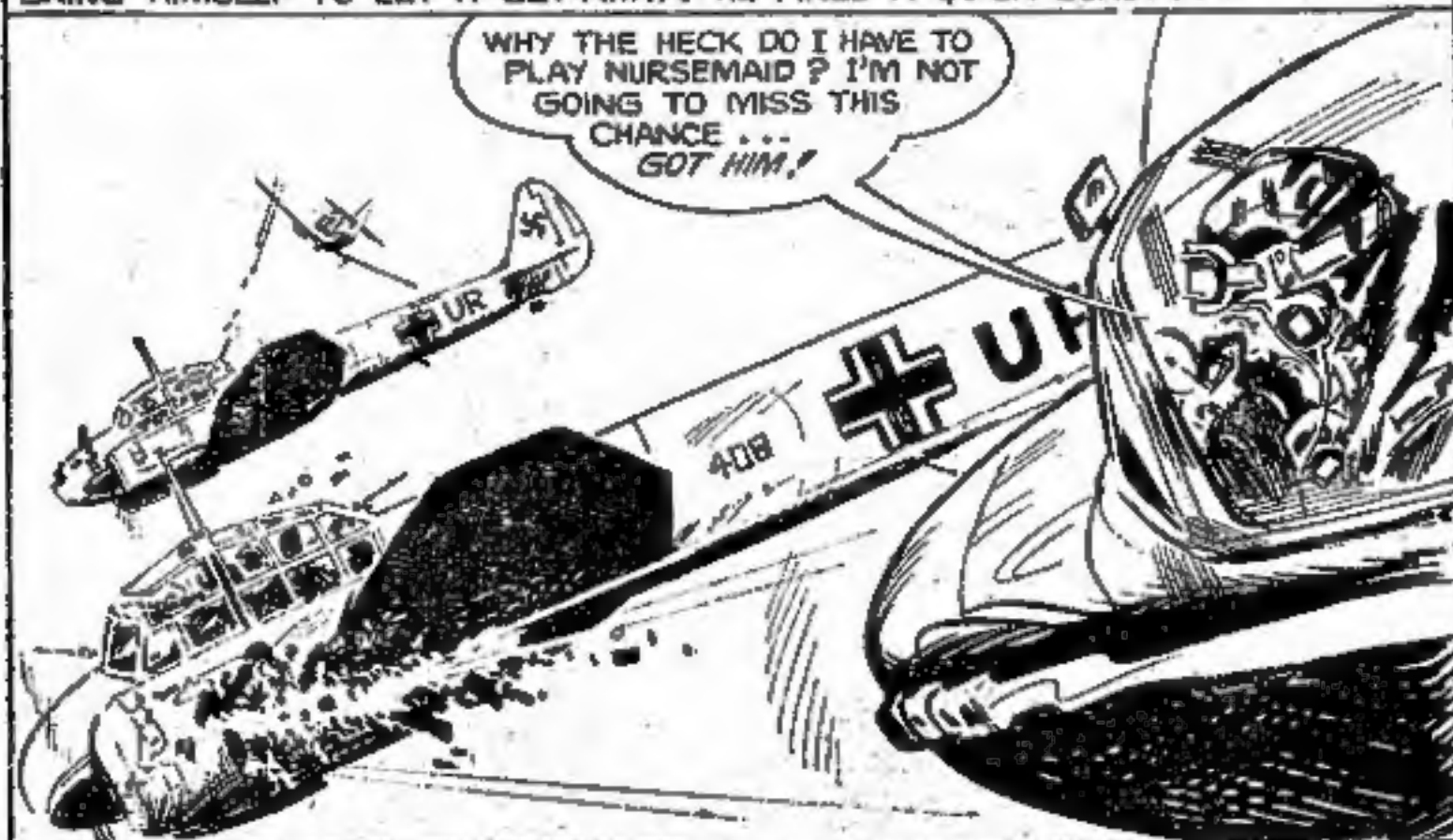
BREAK OFF! I'VE GOT THIS BABY RIGHT WHERE I WANT HIM...

I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE HOLDING HANDS, THORNTON — BREAK!

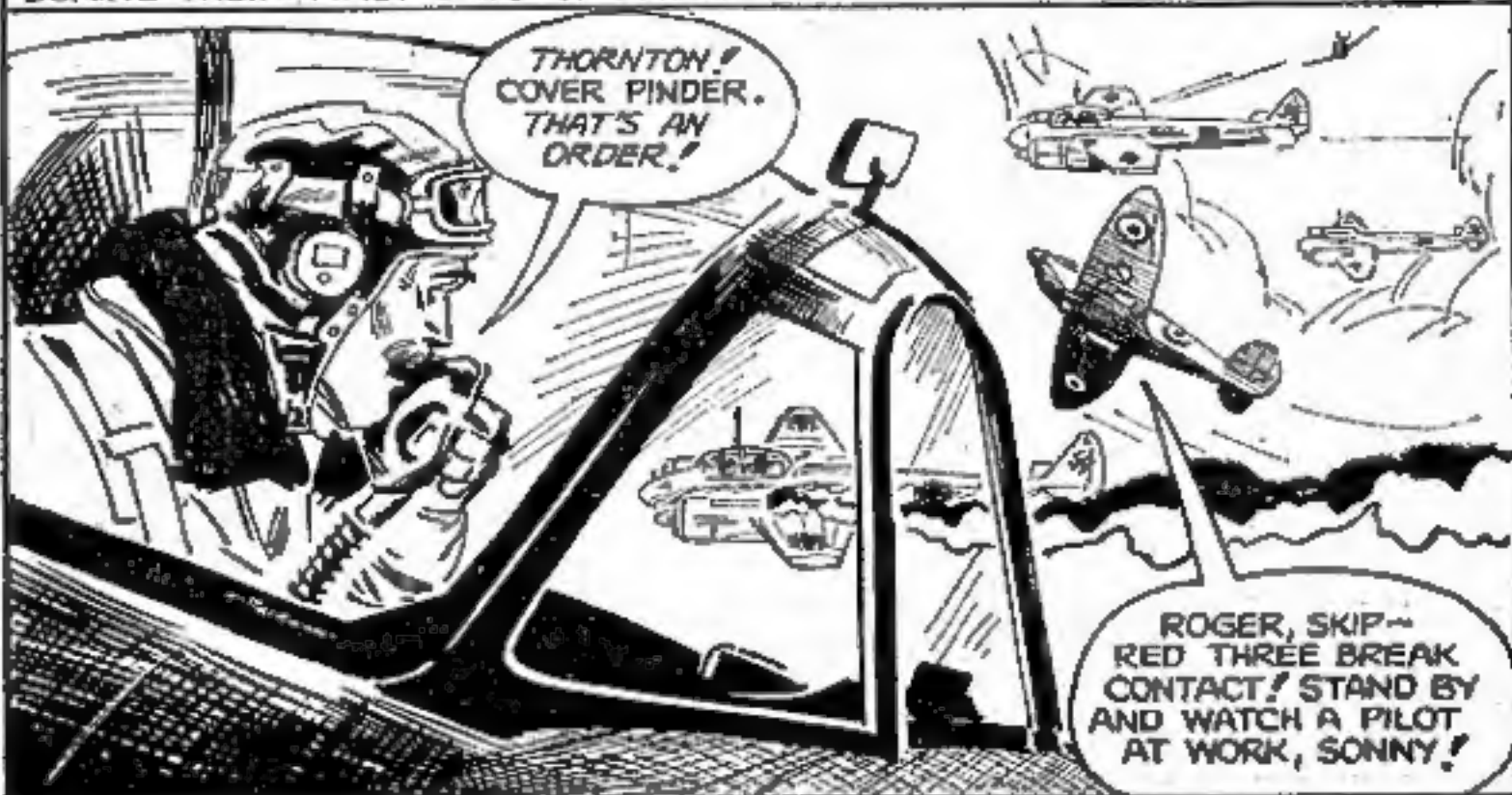


THE JUNKERS WAS SET SQUARELY IN HIS GUNSIGHT. THORNTON COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO LET IT GET AWAY. HE FIRED A QUICK BURST...

WHY THE HECK DO I HAVE TO PLAY NURSEMAID? I'M NOT GOING TO MISS THIS CHANCE... GOT HIM!



SQUADRON LEADER RUSSELL'S VOICE SOUNDED WEARY AS IT CRACKLED THROUGH THE RADIO. HE KNEW THAT ONLY BY WORKING THE SQUADRON AS A TEAM COULD HE HOPE TO KEEP THE LESS EXPERIENCED PILOTS ALIVE DURING THEIR FIRST DAYS OF ACTION . . .



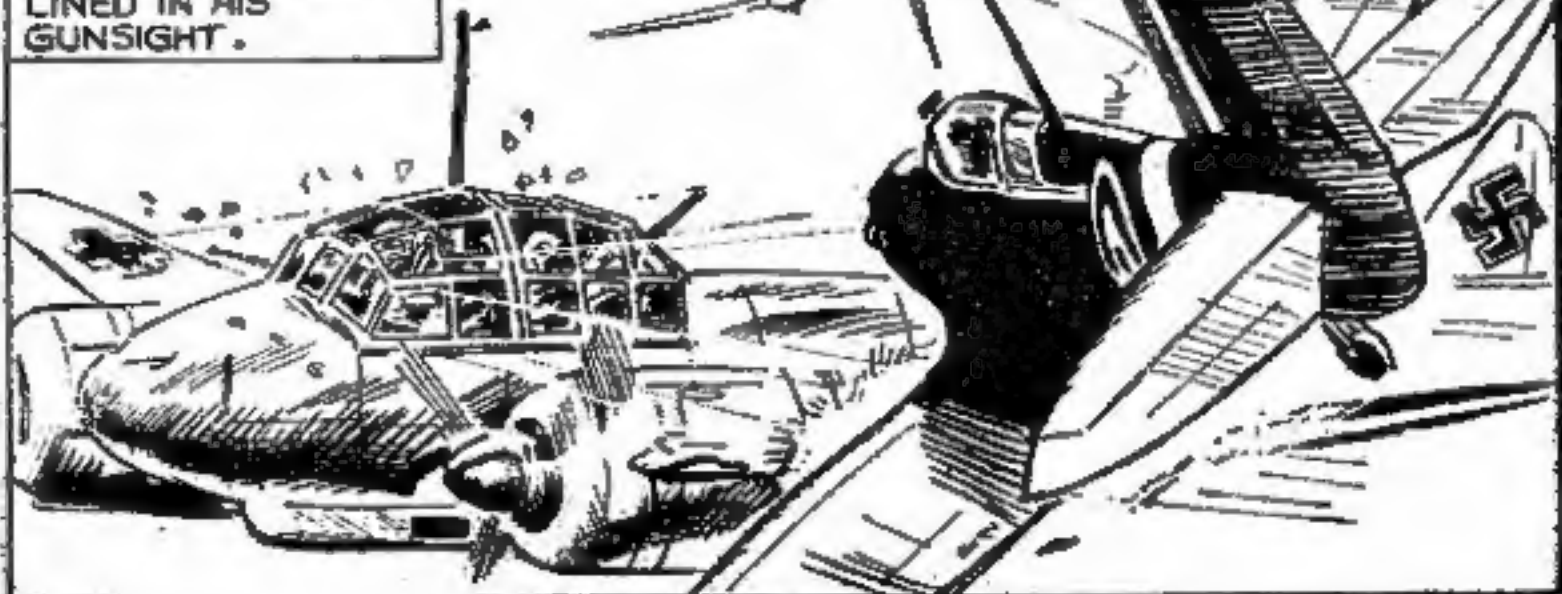
PINDER LACKED EXPERIENCE BUT HE DID NOT LACK COURAGE. STUNG BY THORNTON'S WORDS, HE TRIED AGAIN TO BREAK THROUGH THE WITHERING FIELD OF FIRE FROM THE JUNKERS . . .



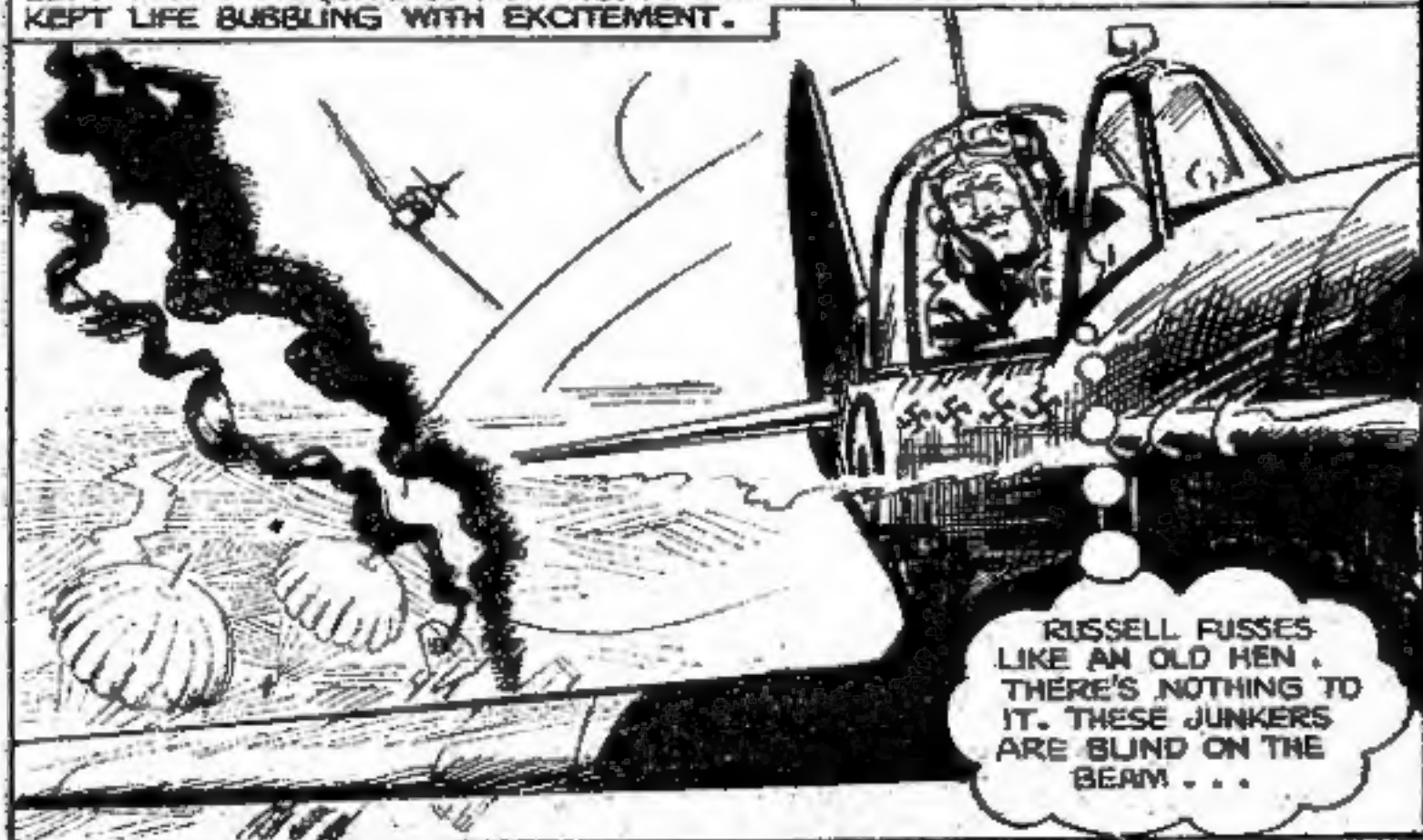
THE WELL-PLACED BURST FROM THORNTON'S BROWINGS RIPPED THROUGH THE JUNKERS' FUSELAGE, KILLING THE GUNNER JUST AS HE HAD PINDER'S COCKPIT SQUARELY LINED IN HIS GUNSIGHT.

RELAX, PINDER, IT'S ALL OVER!

GREAT SCOTT! ONE SHORT BLAST AND HE'S NAILED 'EM! WHAT A PILOT!

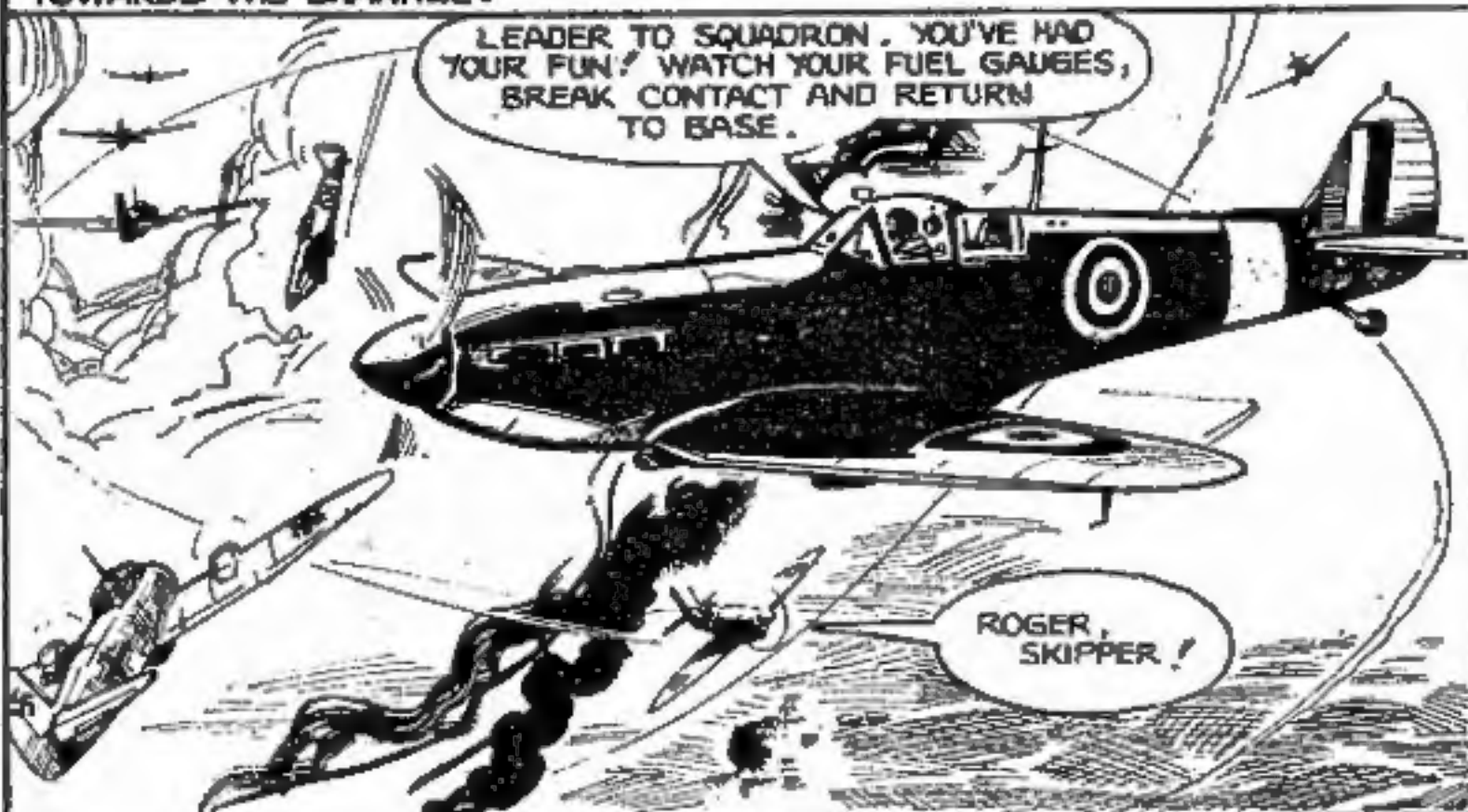


THE FACT THAT HE HAD SAVED PINDER'S LIFE ONLY BY A FRACTION OF A SECOND LEFT THORNTON QUITE UNPERTURBED. FOR HIM, THESE WERE THE KICKS THAT KEPT LIFE BUBBLING WITH EXCITEMENT.



RUSSELL FUSSES LIKE AN OLD HEN. THERE'S NOTHING TO IT. THESE JUNKERS ARE BUND ON THE BEAM...

ONCE THE BOMBER FORMATION WAS BROKEN, THEY WERE UNABLE TO PUT UP AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIVE FIELD OF FIRE, AND THE SPITFIRES HERDED THEM BACK TOWARDS THE CHANNEL.



WHEN HE HAD LANDED, RUSSELL CUT HIS ENGINE, CLAMBERED FROM HIS COCKPIT AND STORMED OVER TO THORNTON. HIS FACE FLUSHED WITH ANGER...

TWO MORE - NOT BAD, EH, SKIP?

JUST BECAUSE YOU GET A COUPLE OF KILLS, THORNTON, DON'T GET THE IDEA YOU CAN DO NO WRONG. IT'S TEAM WORK THAT COUNTS UP THERE, WHATEVER YOU MAY THINK!



IRRITATED BY THE SELF-SATISFIED YOUNG PILOT'S ATTITUDE, RUSSELL TOOK ON A TONE OF BLISTERING SARCASTIC.

THAT PLANE WAS RIGHT IN MY SIGHTS WHEN YOU CALLED ME OFF. I'D HAVE BEEN CRAZY TO MISS A CHANCE LIKE THAT!

LOOK, THORNTON, LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT. WHEN I GIVE YOU AN ORDER, YOU OBEY IT - IMMEDIATELY!



FLUSHED WITH EMBARRASSMENT, THE HESITANT PINDER STEPPED FORWARD...



THE TONGUE-LASHING OBVIOUSLY INSTANTLY FORGOTTEN, THORNTON AND THE OTHERS WANDERED, LAUGHING AND JOKING, ACROSS THE GRASS TOWARDS THE NEAREST BLOCK OF BUILDINGS...



SURROUNDED BY ADMIRERS, THORNTON GRINNED AS PINDER RELATED ONE OF HIS DARE-DEVIL ACTIVITIES . . .

...HIS UNDERCART WAS ONLY FEET FROM THE OLD MAN'S HEAD. THE CAR WAS LURCHING ALL OVER THE PLACE AND THORNTON WAS LAUGHING FIT TO BURST...

I THINK THE POOR FELLOW REALLY THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO LAND ON HIM! IT WAS GOOD SPORT, I CAN TELL YOU!



I DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULDN'T ENJOY THE WAR—POOR OLD RUSSELL TAKES THE WHOLE THING MUCH TOO SERIOUSLY!

YOU CERTAINLY LIVEN THIS DUMP UP, ANYWAY! HOW ABOUT GOING INTO MELPERSHAM FOR A NIGHT OUT?



WITH A QUICK GLANCE AT THE DUTY ROSTER, EIGHT OF THEM BOUNDED, WHOOPING, ACROSS THE TARMAC TOWARDS THORNTON'S BATTERED SPORTS CAR...

YOU'LL NEED A SHOE HORN, BUT WE'LL GET YOU ALL ABOARD, OLD ANNIE'S TAKEN ELEVEN BEFORE NOW...

OUCH! THAT'S MY FOOT, YOU GREAT CLOD-HOPPING IDIOT...



NORMALLY RUSSELL ENCOURAGED HIS MEN TO RELAX AND LET OFF STEAM WHILE THEY WERE OFF-DUTY, BUT AS HE AND THE COMMANDING OFFICER WATCHED THEM GO, HIS FEATURES WERE TROUBLED...

BUT YOU'VE JUST TOLD ME HE'S AN EXCELLENT PILOT, RUSSELL!

HE'S CERTAINLY THAT, SIR— BUT ONLY WHEN IT SUITS HIM! THORNTON'S COMPLETELY UNPREDICTABLE!



SORRY TO HEAR THAT, RUSSELL. I WAS ABOUT TO SUGGEST PROMOTION FOR THORNTON!



I DAREN'T RECOMMEND HIM, SIR, HE'S TOO UNRELIABLE TO BE ENTRUSTED WITH MEN'S LIVES!

THORNTON'S A STRANGE MIXTURE... GOOD FAMILY, FIRST-RATE EDUCATION, A KEEN BRAIN—EVERYTHING THAT NORMALLY MAKES UP THE IDEAL PILOT. BUT HE HAS NO SELF-DISCIPLINE! HE'S A PILOT PURELY FOR KICKS!



HMM... PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT...

TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF TIME-HONOURED SERVICE SONGS, THE LITTLE CAR GALLANTLY STRUGGLED ITS WAY THROUGH THE LEAFY LANES...

GOES LIKE A BOMB, DOESN'T SHE? SHOULD DO—I HELPED MYSELF TO SOME AVIATION SPIRIT. SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF WE TOOK OFF!

SMASHING CAR. WHERE D'YOU GET THE PETROL?



PINDER WAS SHOCKED AT THE CASUAL WAY IN WHICH THORNTON SPOKE OF OBTAINING FUEL FOR HIS CAR . . .

YOU STOLE IT? BUT MERCHANT SHIPS HAVE BEEN SUNK BRINGING THAT STUFF OVER!

DON'T BE STUFFY, OLD CHAP! IF IT WASN'T FOR THE AIR FORCE, MOST OF THOSE CONVOYS WOULD NEVER MAKE IT TO ENGLAND, ANYWAY!

YOU'RE TOO SCARED OF AUTHORITY, PINDER OLD LAD - THAT'S YOUR TROUBLE. I RECKON RULES ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN!



HAPPILY THEY CROWDED INTO THE BLACK-BEAMED, SMOKY WARMTH OF THE 'BRIGHT SPOT' CAFE.



EIGHT STEAK PIES
AND CHIPS, GUY'NOR—
AND LET'S HAVE EIGHT
STRONG TEAS TO BE
GETTING ON WITH...

I'VE NO RIGHT
TO CRITICISE HIM—
HE'S A DARNED SIGHT
BETTER PILOT THAN
I'LL EVER BE!

IDLY PLAYING DARTS AS THE FOOD WAS BEING COOKED, THE CONTENTED HUM OF CONVERSATION FELL AWAY TO AN UNBELIEVING SILENCE AS THORNTON DELIVERED A STAGGERING CHALLENGE...



NOT BAD, TAFFY—BUT COULD YOU
PIN A HANDKERCHIEF ON
PINDER'S HEAD TO THE
BOARD?

HEY, COUNT ME OUT, CHUM!
NO-ONE'S PLAYING WILLIAM
TELL WITH MY NAPPER!

EVEN TO THOSE WHO WERE USED TO HIS OFF-BEAT SCHEMES,
THORNTON HAD GONE TOO FAR THIS TIME...

BUT THORNTON THRIVED ON EXCITEMENT. ALTERNATE BULLYING AND FLATTERY PERSUADED PINDER, MUCH AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGMENT, TO AGREE...

I MUST BE CRAZY! BUT IF I'D REFUSED THEY'D HAVE THOUGHT I WAS WINDY...

I'VE GOT FIVE BOB THAT SAYS HE CAN'T DO IT!

YOU'RE ON, KEN! RIGHT ON THE COUNT OF THREE. ONE... TWO...

IT SEEMED TO TAKE THE DART AN ETERNITY TO SPAN THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM. SUDDENLY, A DULL THUD VIBRATED THE BOARD...

MARVELLOUS SHOT, THORNTON... EVEN IF I DID LOSE MY DOLLAR!

THANKS! LIVENED THE OLD PLACE UP FOR A MINUTE, DIDN'T IT?

AT LAST, LAUGHING AND JOKING, THEY PILED BACK INTO THE CAR. THE SORELY-TRIED ENGINE GOT UNDER WAY, BELLOWING SMOKY TRAILS OF EXHAUST FUMES...

ALL ABOARD—SHE'S OFF!

SHOVE UP, YOU MISERABLE LOT—I'M NOT GOING TO RUN BACK TO BASE!



IN HIGH SPIRITS, THEY BOWLED BACK ALONG THE COUNTRY LANES. SUDDENLY, A FLAG WAVING FRANTICALLY DIRECTLY AHEAD OF THEM CAUGHT THORNTON'S GAZE. A GLITTER CAME INTO HIS EYES . . .

WHAT'S GOING ON . . . ?

IT'S THE LEVEL-CROSSING, OLD SON!

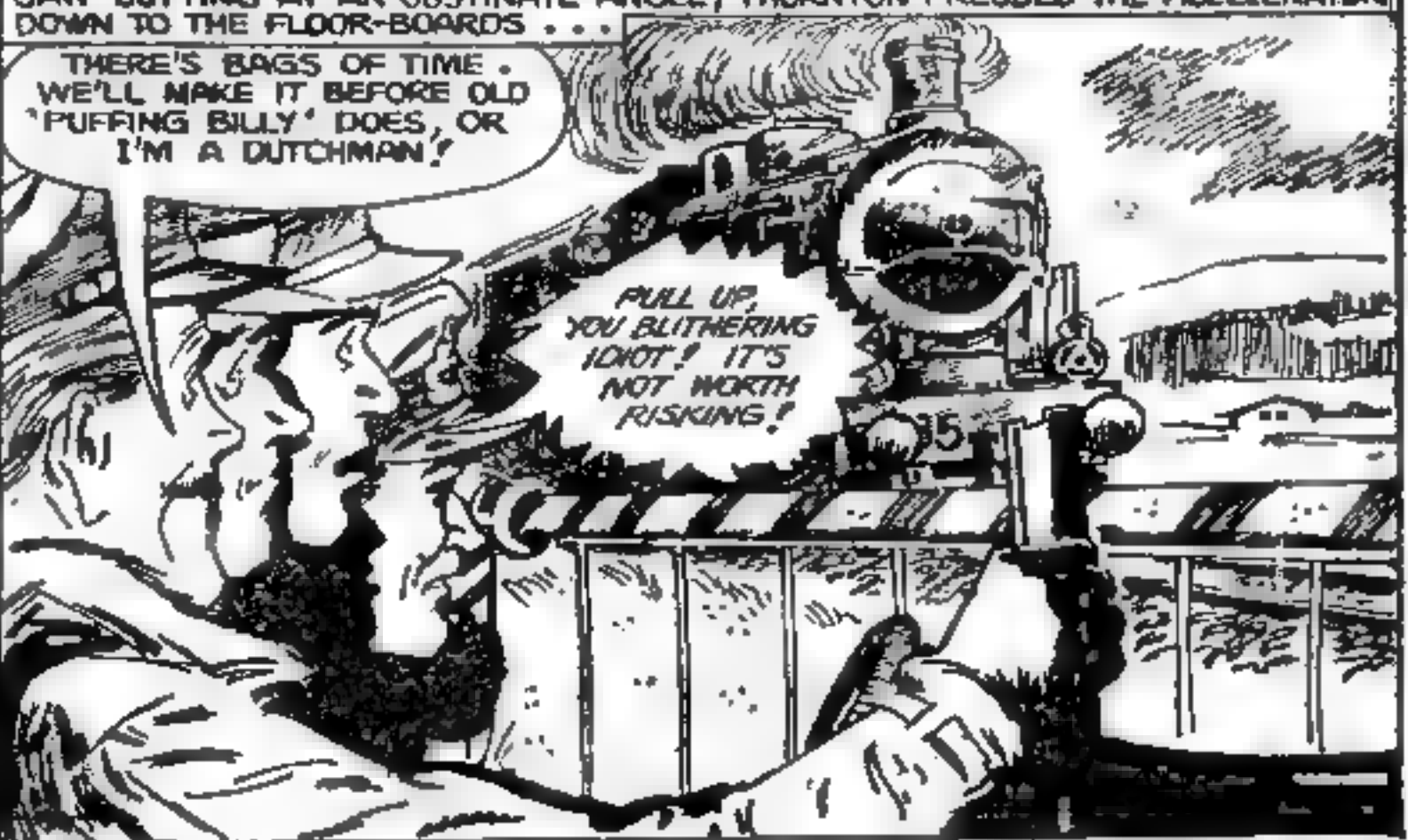
STOP! I'M CLOSING THE GATES TO LET THE EXPRESS THROUGH!

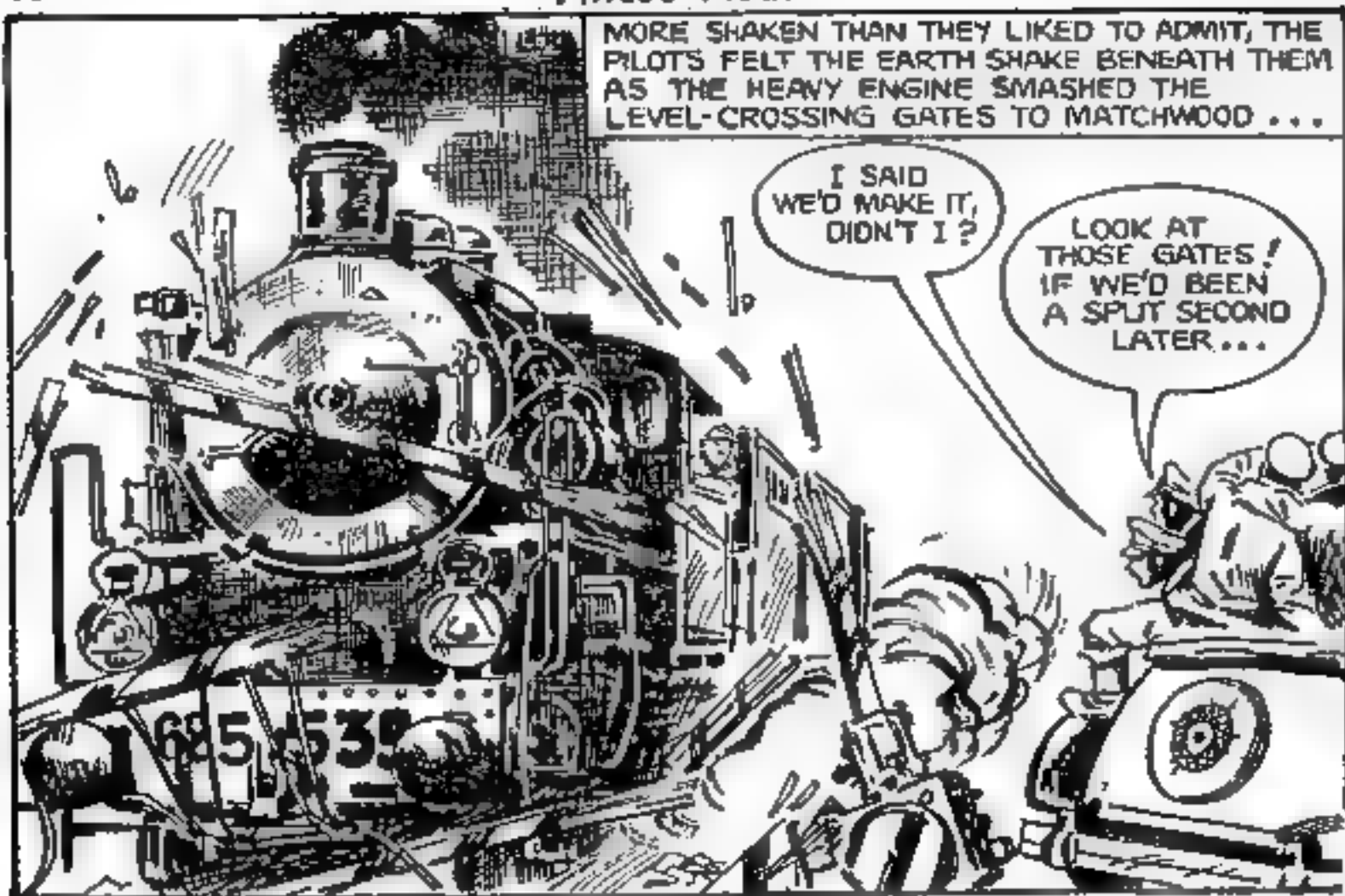


JAW JUTTING AT AN OBSTINATE ANGLE, THORNTON PRESSED THE ACCELERATOR DOWN TO THE FLOOR-BOARDS . . .

THERE'S BAGS OF TIME. WE'LL MAKE IT BEFORE OLD 'PUFFING BILLY' DOES, OR I'M A DUTCHMAN!

PULL UP, YOU BLITHERING IDIOT! IT'S NOT WORTH RISKING!





THE LAST COACH
ROARED PAST THEM...
A VOICE BELLOWED
FROM THE WRECKED
CROSSING... A VOICE
QUIVERING WITH
INDIGNATION! ...



UNLIKE HIS FRIENDS, WHO SAT SILENT AND THOUGHTFUL, THE NARROW BRUSH WITH DEATH HAD STIMULATED THORNTON . . .

COME ON, YOU LOT! CHEER UP! YOU'RE SITTING THERE AS IF YOU'VE SEEN A GHOST!

I FEEL AS IF I HAVE, CHUM-MINE!

THEY REACHED THEIR BASE TO FIND IT A FRENZIED HIVE OF ACTIVITY. A TIGHT-LIPPED SQUADRON LEADER STRODE TOWARDS THEM, ANGER GLINTING IN HIS EYES . . .

'B' FLIGHT'S CAUGHT A PACKET! YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK AN HOUR AGO . . . BE READY FOR TAKE-OFF IN TWO MINUTES...



Chapter 2. *Sitting Duck*

IN THE LOCKER ROOM, FLYING KIT WAS FLUNG ON, EQUIPMENT SNATCHED UP...

BUCK UP! LET'S GET STUCK INTO THOSE BLIGHTERS. I FEEL LIKE A GOOD SCRAP!

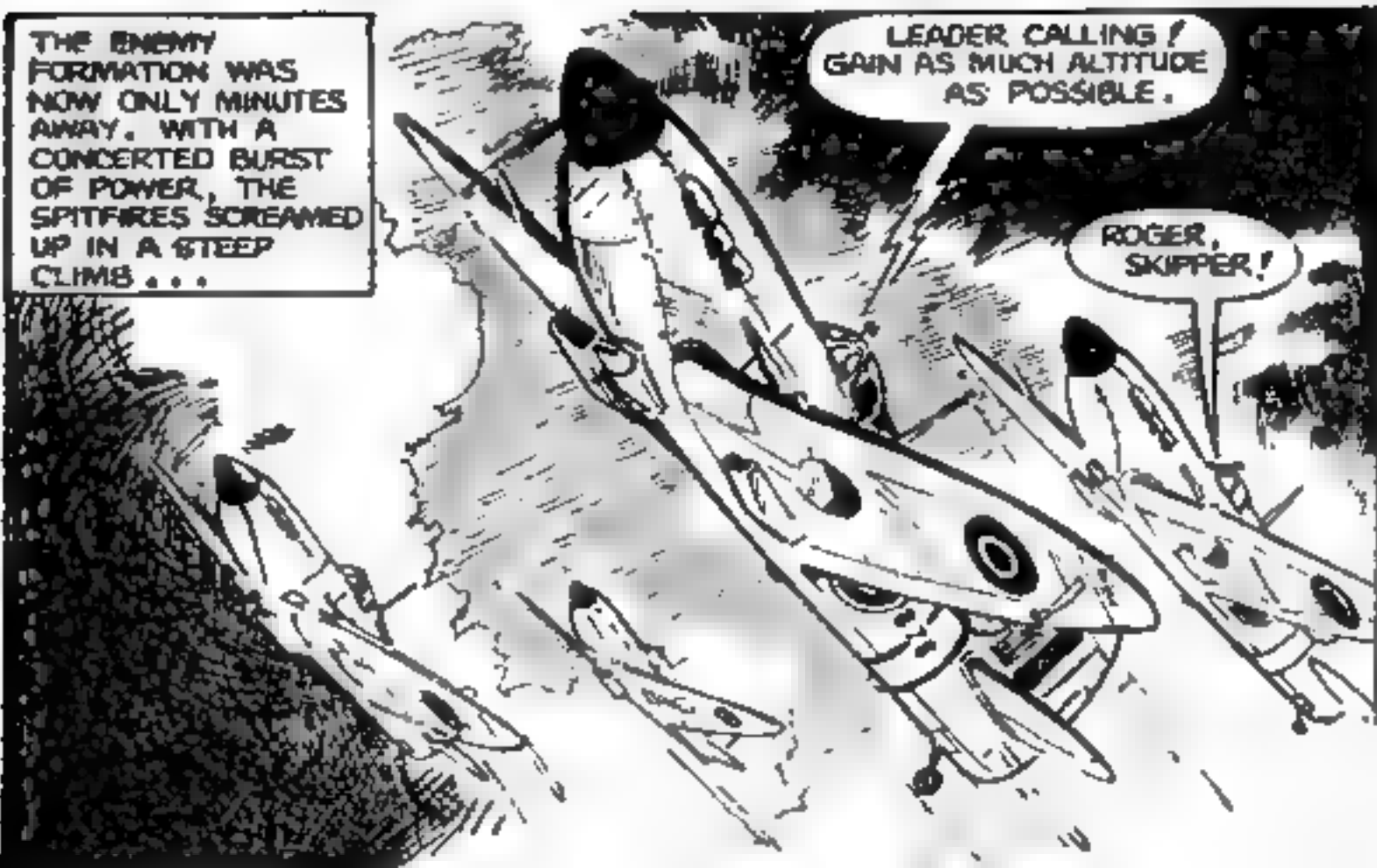
I'D HATE TO BE A JERRY WHILE THORNTON'S IN THIS CRAZY MOOD!



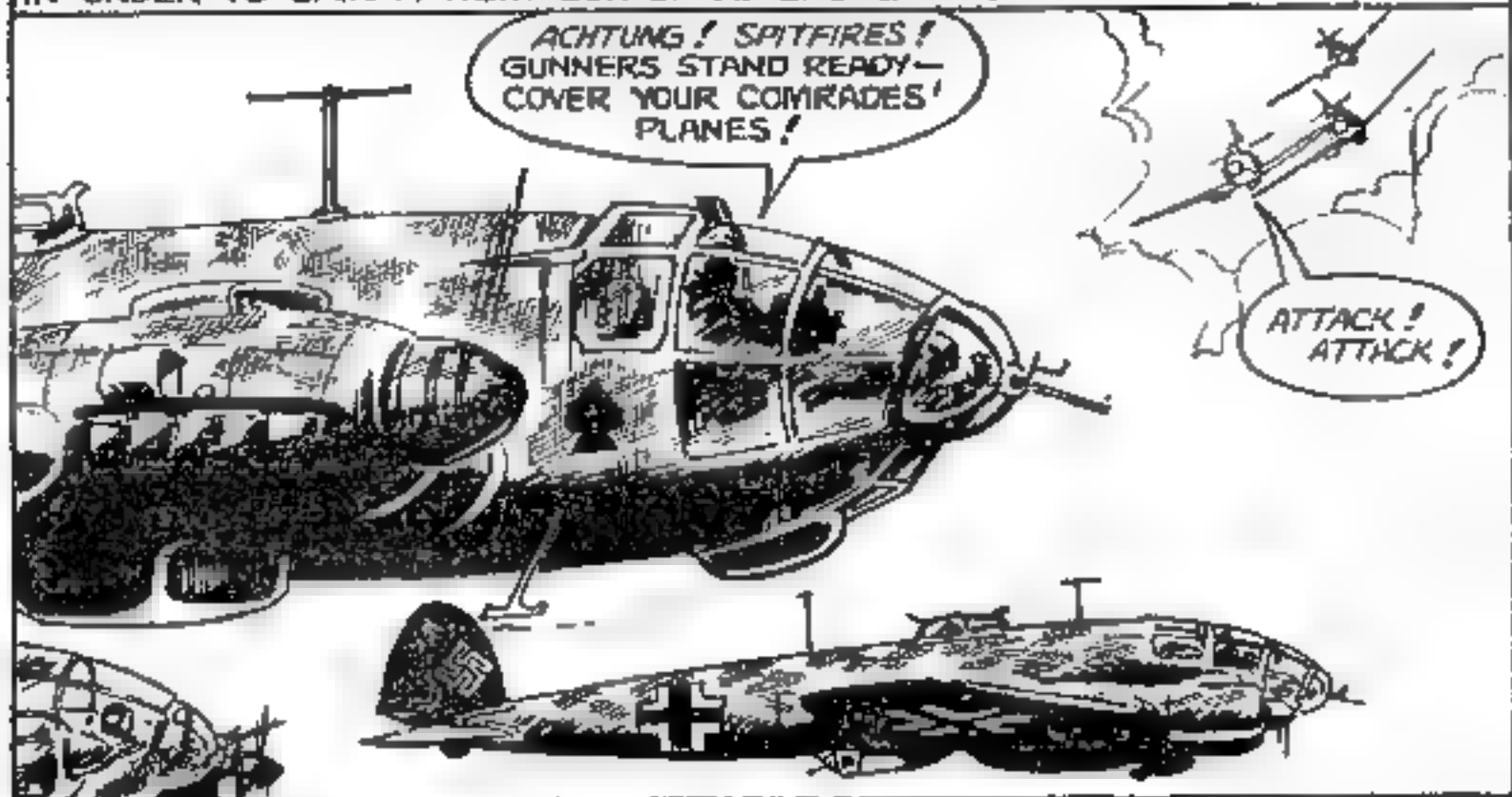
THE ENEMY FORMATION WAS NOW ONLY MINUTES AWAY. WITH A CONCERTED BURST OF POWER, THE SPITFIRES SCREAMED UP IN A STEEP CLIMB...

LEADER CALLING! GAIN AS MUCH ALTITUDE AS POSSIBLE.

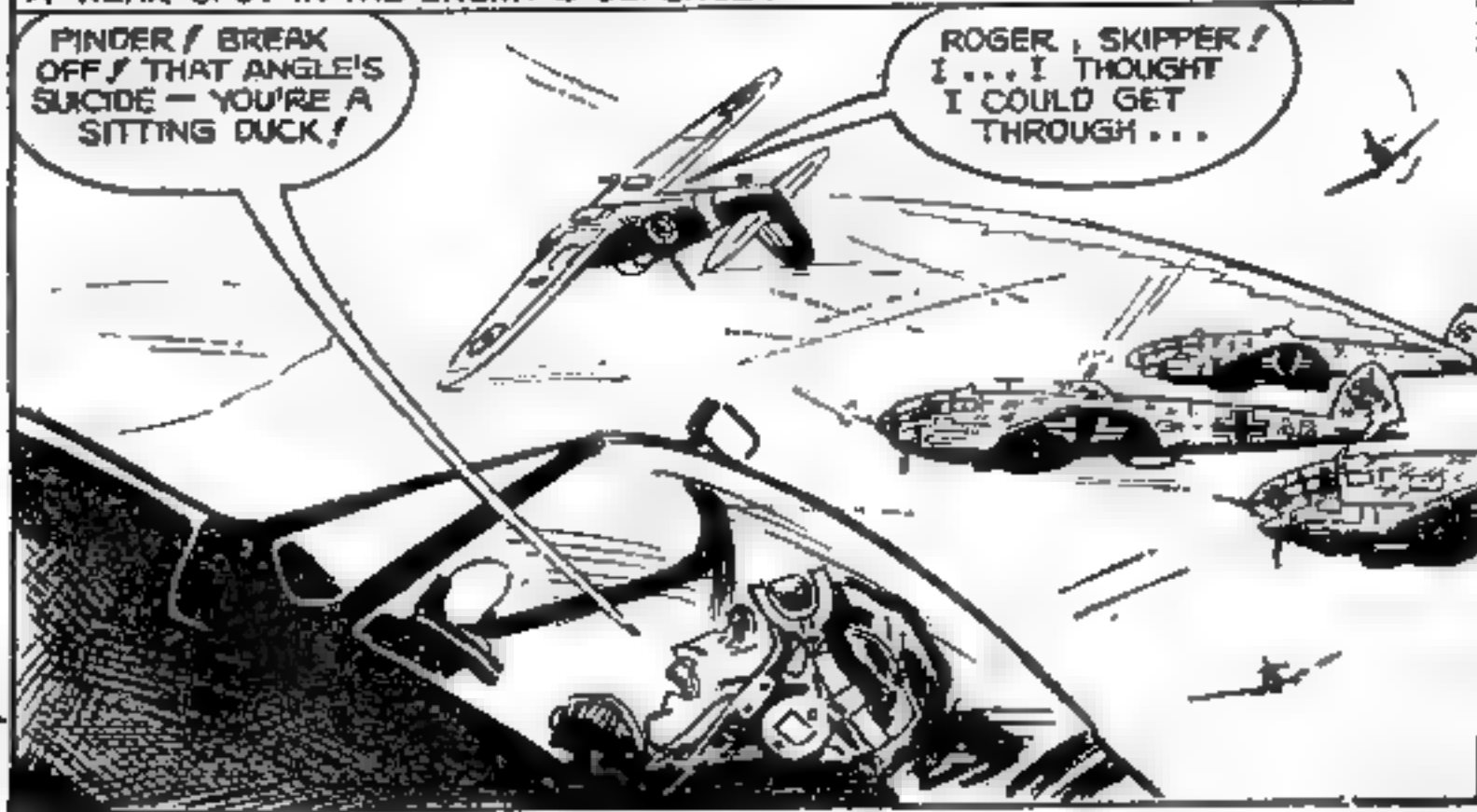
ROGER, SKIPPER!



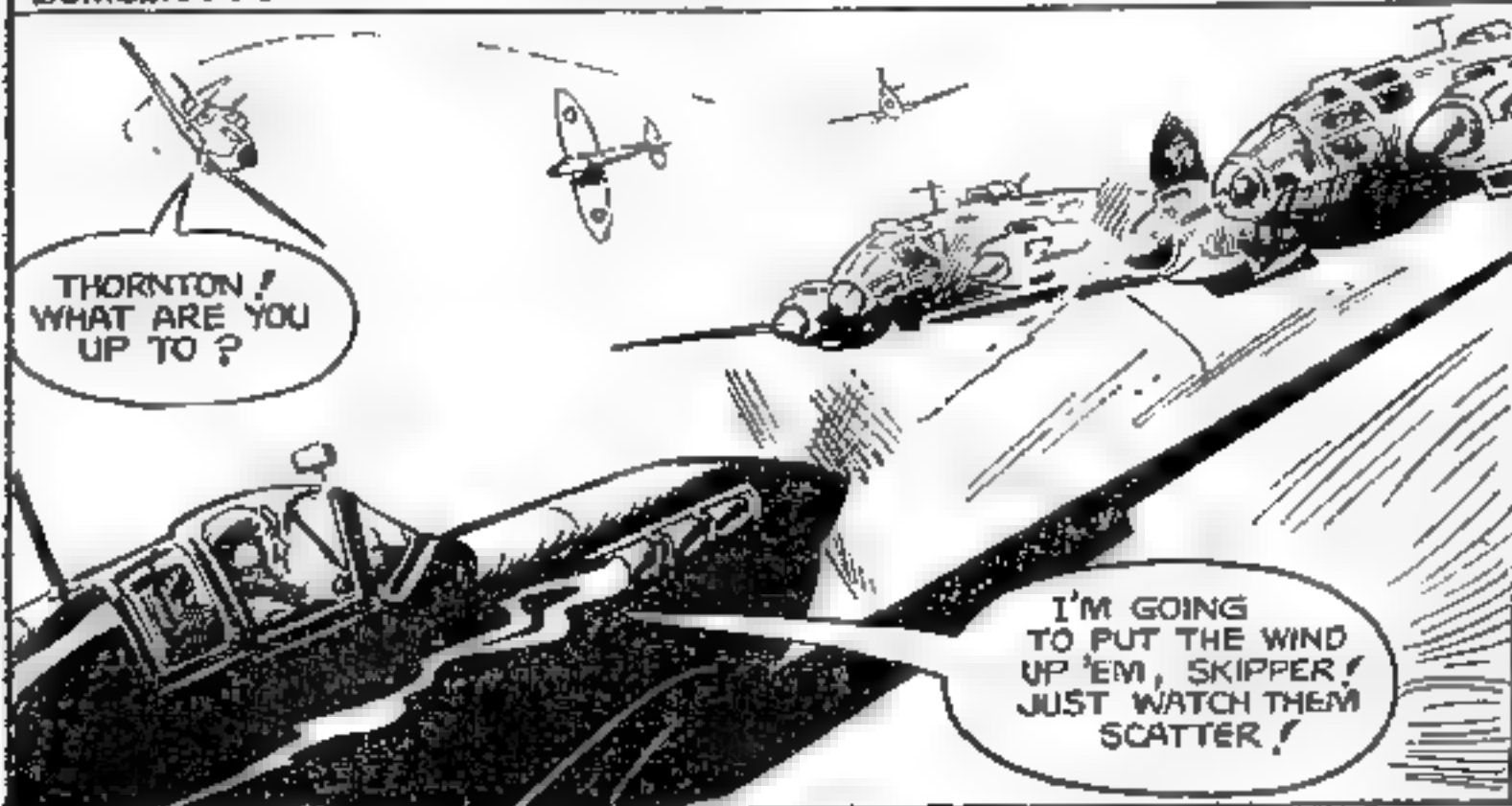
THE GERMANS FAITH IN THE FIRE-POWER OF THE HEINKEL PROVED UNJUSTIFIED WHEN THEY BEGAN THEIR ONSLAUGHT ON THE BRITISH ISLES. THEY HAD FOUND, HOWEVER, THE BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS LAY IN MAINTAINING CLOSE FORMATION IN ORDER TO GAIN A TIGHT BOX OF DEFENSIVE FIRE.



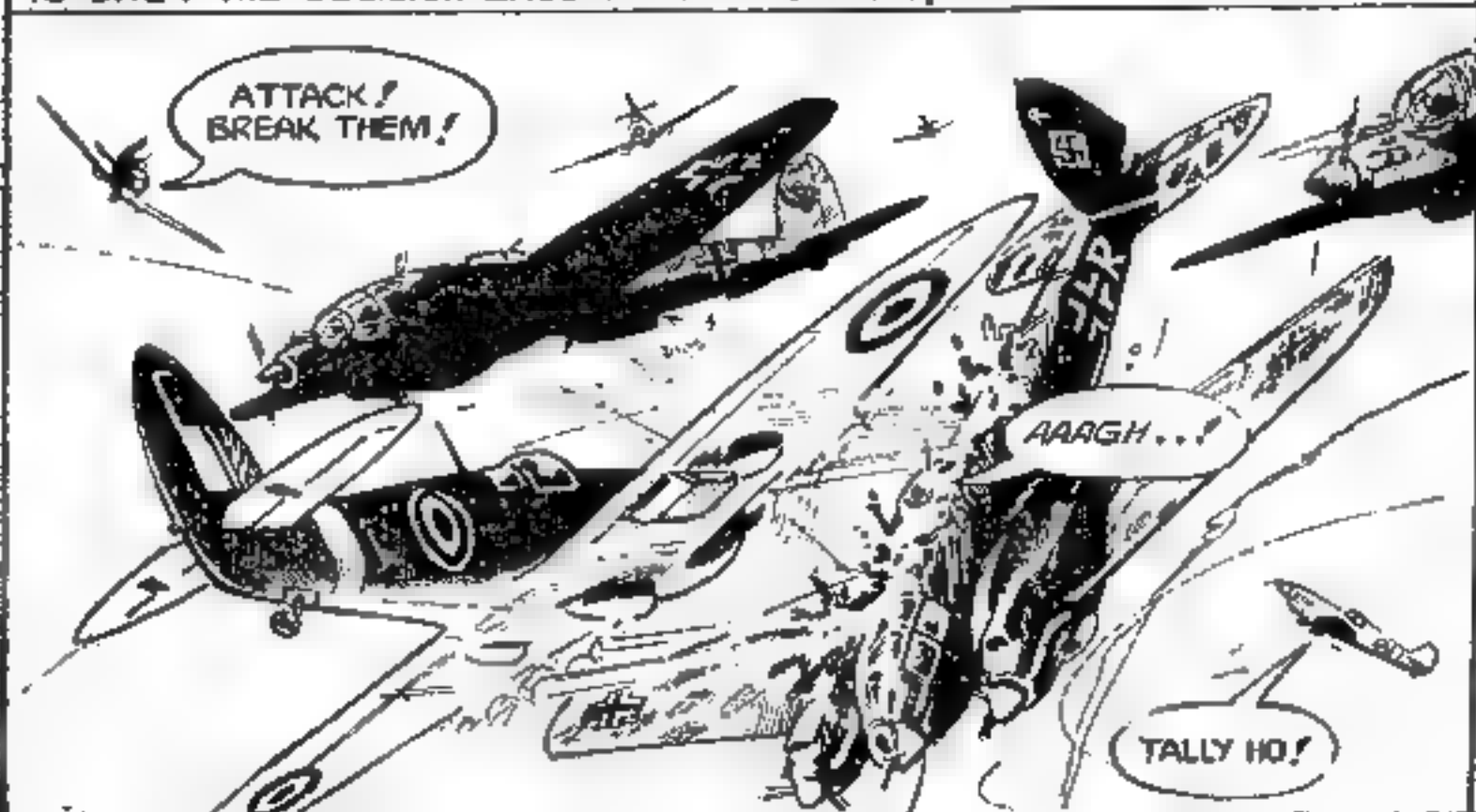
DESPITE A DETERMINED ATTACK, THE GERMANS STEADILY HELD THEIR FORMATION. THE FIGHTERS PROBED FROM ALL SIDES, TRYING TO FIND A WEAK SPOT IN THE ENEMY'S DEFENCE.



AT SUCH TIMES OF DANGER, THORNTON RODE ON A WAVE OF EXCITEMENT AND, THROUGH SOME ACT OF BRAVADO, WOULD ACCELERATE THE PACE OF THE BATTLE. HE SET HIS FIGHTER STRAIGHT AT THE NOSE OF THE LEADING GERMAN BOMBER . . .



THORNTON HELD COLLISION COURSE UNTIL A CRASH SEEMED INEVITABLE. UNABLE TO SWING BECAUSE OF HIS OWN WING PLANES, THE GERMAN LEADER DECIDED TO DIVE. HIS DECISION BROUGHT HIM DISASTER!



THE GERMAN LEADER NEVER PULLED OUT OF HIS DIVE. HIS HEINKEL TORE STRAIGHT INTO THE KENT COUNTRYSIDE, ITS SCREAMING ENGINES POURING SMOKE. THE ATTACK WAS BROKEN!



THE TASTE OF TRIUMPH SWEET IN HIS MOUTH, THORNTON BANKED SMOOTHLY—AND PLUNGED BACK INTO THE FRACAS!



SMASHED AND DEMORALISED, THE SURVIVING ENEMY PLANES TURNED AND FLED...

THEY'RE
RUNNING WITH THEIR
TAILS BETWEEN THEIR
LEGS NOW! BREAK
OFF THE ATTACK!

ROGER,
SKIP!

LIGHT-HEADED WITH
SUCCESS, THEY RETURNED
TRIUMPHANTLY TO THE
AIRFIELD. AS THEY
REACHED THE CONTROL
TOWER, THORNTON
SUDDENLY PUT HIS PLANE
INTO A SCREAMING DIVE.

WE SMASHED
'EM. YAHOO!

GET DOWN!
THE CRAZY
FOOL...!



MISSING THE TOWER BY INCHES, THE SPITFIRE ROARED OFF DOWN THE RUNWAY. SEETHING WITH OUTRAGED INDIGNATION, THE SHAKEN MEN HAULED THEMSELVES UP FROM THE FLOOR AND PEELED THROUGH THE GLASS . . .

I'LL HAVE THAT IDIOT PILOT GROUNDED IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO! CAN YOU MAKE OUT HIS MARKINGS, ROBERTSON?

'FRAID NOT, SIR - AND IN A FEW SECONDS HE'LL BE LOST AMONG THE REST OF THE SQUADRON . . .



THE SQUADRON TOUCHED DOWN AND GOOD-HUMOUREDLY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE LOCKER-ROOM TO CHANGE OUT OF THEIR FLYING KIT. THEIR CHUCKLES DIED AWAY AS THE WING COMMANDER, HIS FACE TAUT WITH SUPPRESSED FURY, BURST IN . . .

I'LL GIVE THE JOKER WHO BUZZED THE CONTROL TOWER EXACTLY FIVE SECONDS TO COME FORWARD - OR I'LL CONFINED THE LOT OF YOU TO BASE!

DID YOU SAY 'BUZZED THE CONTROL TOWER', SIR . . . P



THORNTON'S BLANDLY INNOCENT EYES STARED BACK AT HIM . . .

STRUGGLING WITH HIS TEMPER, THE WING COMMANDER STRODE FROM THE ROOM, HIS BROW AS BLACK AS THUNDER . . .

WE'RE OBVIOUSLY NOT GOING TO GET ANYTHING OUT OF THEM! AND EVERY MAN-JACK OF 'EM KNOWS PERFECTLY WELL WHO WE'RE AFTER!

I'VE A PRETTY SHREWD IDEA MYSELF, SIR— BUT I CAN'T PROVE IT!



THEY FLEW TOGETHER IN THE SKIES AND STUCK BY ONE ANOTHER ON THE GROUND. BUT— ONCE THEIR SUPERIORS WERE OUT OF EARSHOT— VOICES WERE RAISED IN ANGRY CONDEMNATION.

YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE CONTROLLERS' FACES! THEY WERE SCARED OUT OF THEIR SKINS!

LAUGH AWAY, THORNTON— BUT I NOTICE WE'RE PAYING FOR YOUR IDEA OF FUN, AREN'T WE?



DAYS PASSED IN WHICH THE SQUADRON MADE SEVERAL SORTIES EVERY DAYLIGHT PERIOD AGAINST THE GIGANTIC FORCES OF BOMBERS SENT TO STORM THE ISLAND FORTRESS OF ENGLAND.

HELLO, THORNTON. I'VE JUST PICKED UP MY MAIL. THERE'S ONE FOR YOU!

PROBABLY FROM MOTHER. SHE USUALLY WRITES EACH WEEK...



CASUALLY, THORNTON READ THE FIRST PAGE -
FULL OF THE USUAL NEWSY GOSSIP - AND
TURNED OVER . . .

- 2 -

- in the garden.

By the way, I'm afraid
your Father's not too well at
the moment. Jaundice - but nothing
to worry about. The doctor
says a few weeks should see
him nearly back to normal.
I bumped into Mrs. Evans
yesterday, and she sends
her . . .

A PARAGRAPH SUDDENLY CAUGHT
HIS EYE . . .

'BOB, HARRY AND MOST OF THE
GANG ARE HOME ON EMBARKATION
LEAVE - THEY'RE NOT SURE WHERE
THEY'RE GOING, BUT PROBABLY TO
THE FAR EAST.' HMM . . .

WISH I COULD GIVE
THEM ALL A FAREWELL
PARTY BUT THERE'S
NO CHANCE . . . WAIT A
MINUTE THOUGH,
THERE IS ONE WAY -
COMPASSIONATE
LEAVE!

SQUADRON LEADER RUSSELL'S REACTION WAS BRIEF AND CAUSTIC.

COMPASSIONATE LEAVE? DON'T TRY TO FOOL ME, THORNTON. THIS LETTER MAKES IT QUITE CLEAR YOUR FATHER'S NOT SERIOUSLY ILL!

MY MOTHER ALWAYS PLAYS DOWN ANYTHING SERIOUS, SIR - BUT I CAN READ BETWEEN THE LINES...



FATHER'S NEVER BEEN VERY STRONG. PERHAPS...

ONCE AND FOR ALL, THORNTON, THE ANSWER'S NO! AND DON'T COME TO ME AGAIN WITH YOUR COCK-AND-BULL YARNS!



FURIOUS, THORNTON WENT OUT, SLAMMING THE OFFICE DOOR BEHIND HIM . . .

DARN IT! IF I DON'T GO HOME NOW, I MIGHT NOT HAVE A CHANCE OF SEEING THE LADS AGAIN FOR YEARS!



BUT AS HE SPOTTED PINDER TALKING TO SOME OF THE PILOTS, A SUDDEN IDEA CAME TO HIM . . .

DETERMINEDLY, HE BUTTIN-HOLED PINDER AND DREW HIM ASIDE . . .

LOOK, PINDER - YOU'RE ON STAND-DOWN THIS WEEK-END AND I WANT TO GET AWAY. HOW ABOUT CHANGING PLACES?

IF ANYONE FOUND OUT, WE'D BE IN TROUBLE, THORNTON...



IMPATIENTLY, THORNTON TRIED NEW TACTICS . . .

I'M SURPRISED YOU WON'T DO ME A FAVOUR, CHUM. I HELPED YOU OUT WHEN THAT JERRY HAD YOU IN A TIGHT SPOT, DIDN'T I?



WELL...YES... IT'S JUST THAT...



SPINNING ROUND, THORNTON SLAPPED THE ASTOUNDED PILOT ON THE SHOULDER AND CALMLY IGNORED ALL HIS PROTESTS...

THANKS A LOT, OLD MAN — I KNEW YOU WOULDN'T LET ME DOWN...

BUT...BUT...!

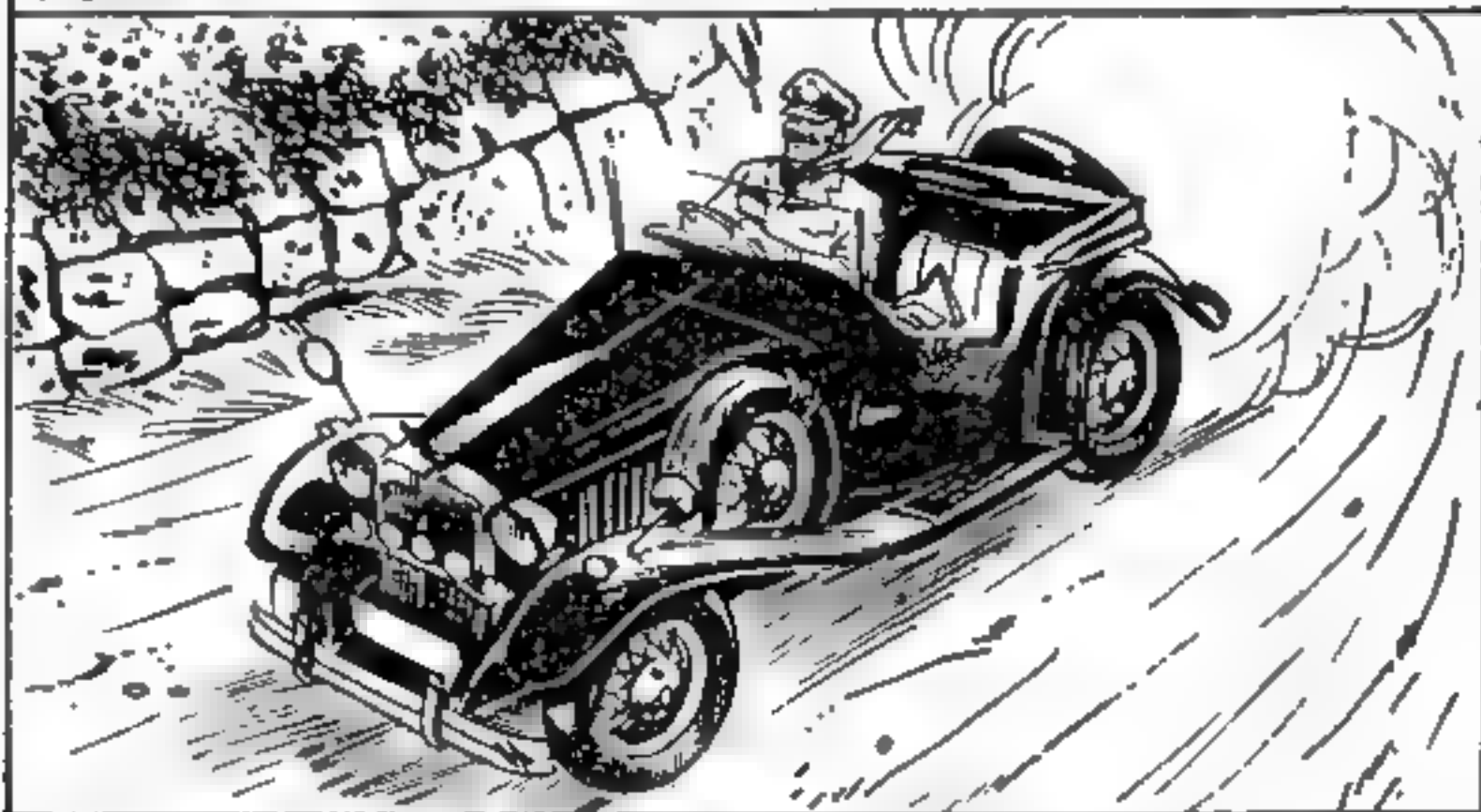
NO, DON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD...

CHUCKLING TO HIMSELF, THORNTON HASTILY PACKED A HAVERSACK AND CREPT OUT TO HIS BATTERED JALOPY...

POOR OLD PINDER — I COULD TALK HIM INTO ANYTHING. HE'S PROBABLY WONDERING NOW HOW HE LET HIMSELF IN FOR THIS!



THE ENGINE'S ROARING POWER ATE UP THE MILES, AND AS THE WIND WHIPPED HIS FACE, A SURGE OF CONTENTMENT FLOWED THROUGH THORNTON.



THE FAMILIAR OUTSKIRTS OF HIS HOME-TOWN LOOMED AROUND HIM. WITH THE BRAKES SCREECHING A WILD PROTEST, THE CAR DREW TO A HALT...



THORNTON WAS POPULAR FOR HIS HIGH-SPIRITED, DEVIL-MAY-CARE ATTITUDE. HIS VISITS TO HIS HOME TOWN WERE USUALLY THE CUE FOR A SERIES OF WILD PARTIES.



THORNTON'S OLD CAR WAS LOW ON ITS SPRINGS AND FILLED TO OVERFLOWING WHEN THEY STOPPED TO COLLECT THE LAST MEMBER OF THE PARTY.



SPRINGS PROTESTING UNDER THE STRAIN, THE OVERLOADED CAR SHUDDERED ON ITS WAY.

HADN'T YOU BETTER SEE HOW YOUR FATHER IS?

PLENTY OF TIME FOR THAT LATER!

LAUGHING, CHATTERING NOISILY, THE GROUP OF YOUNG OFFICERS BURST INTO A NEIGHBOURING HOTEL ...

HELLO, BOYS — HOME AGAIN? NICE TO SEE YOU.

NICE TO BE BACK, GEORGE. USUAL ORDER ALL ROUND ...



THORNTON SOON HAD THE GROUP HANGING ON HIS EVERY WORD AS HE RELATED HIS MORE DARING EXPLOITS WITH THE SQUADRON . . .

THIS JUNKERS HAD THE SPROG PILOT NAILED WHEN I CAME IN ON THEIR BLIND SPOT - A BANG-ON BEAM APPROACH!

SO YOU SAVED THE KID'S LIFE AND WON THE V.C.!

WRAP UP, HARRY! GO ON, WHAT HAPPENED THEN . . ?

THE STORY WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE MOURNFUL WHINE OF AN AIR RAID SIREN . . .

THERE GOES THE WARNING! IF I WAS BACK ON THE 'DROME NOW, I'D BE RUNNING FOR MY SPIT!! WHERE'S EVERYONE GOING?

THEY'LL BE OFF DOWN TO THE SHELTER! WE'VE HAD IT PRETTY HOT AROUND HERE LATELY!

Chapter 3. *Death Strikes Twice*

TO THE MEN ON LEAVE, THE WAR SEEMED VERY REMOTE FROM THEIR PRESENT COMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS.

I'D ADVISE YOU LADS TO GO DOWN TO THE SHELTER. THINGS MAY BE PRETTY HECTIC!

HECTIC? YOU MUST BE JOKING, GEORGE!



THORNTON AND HIS FRIENDS SAUNTERED OUT TO WATCH THE AERIAL BATTLE IN PROGRESS.

THAT'S A BIG FORMATION OF BOMBERS. WHAT ARE THEY, THORNTON?

HEINKELS. THOSE SPITFIRE PILOTS ARE A BUNCH OF DEAD-HEADS! THEY SHOULD ATTACK FROM BELOW, THE HEINKEL'S LOWER GUN IS NOT VERY ACCURATE!



LIKE A CROWD OF ANGRY GNATS, THE TINY FIGHTERS LAUNCHED ATTACK AFTER ATTACK, BUT THE ODDS WERE BALANCED HEAVILY AGAINST THEM . . .

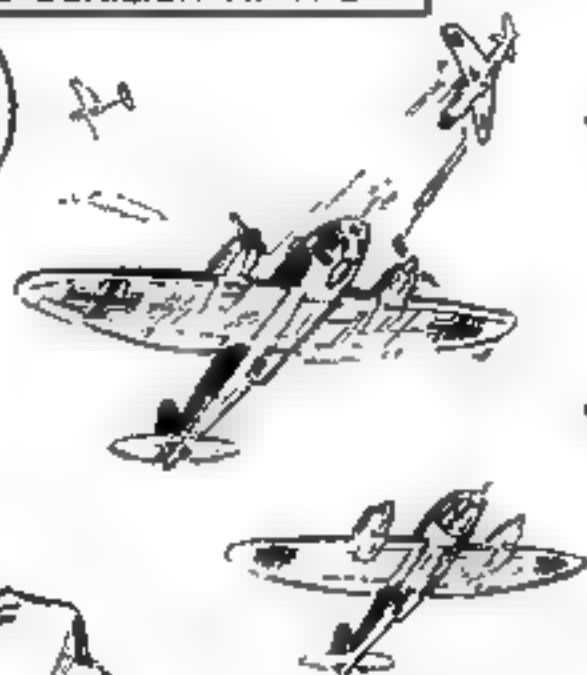
GOOD FOR THEM! THEY'VE WINGED ONE OF THE BLIGHTERS! WONDER IF HE'LL MAKE GERMANY . . .

DOUBT IT! THAT BLOKE LOOKS AS IF HE'S IN REAL TROUBLE!



ONE SPITFIRE'S MANOEUVRES WERE NOTICEABLY INEFFECTUAL. IMPATIENTLY, THORNTON HURLED DISGUST AND DERISION AT THE SKIES . . .

YOU HALF-WITTED IDIOT! YOU CAN'T SHOOT TO SAVE YOUR LIFE! DON'T JUST STAY THERE, MAN—GET AFTER HIM!



ALMOST AS THOUGH THE ANGRY WORDS HAD REACHED THE PILOT'S EARS, THE SPITFIRE BANKED SHARPLY, AND FOR A FEW SECONDS, THE HEINKEL SAT SQUARELY IN ITS SIGHTS. BUT THE PILOT FAILED TO FIRE . . .

GOOD GRIEF!
SURELY THAT'S
HIS CHANCE!

YOU'RE RIGHT,
PAL - BUT HE'S
NOT TAKING IT!
SHOOT, YOU FOOL,
SHOOT!

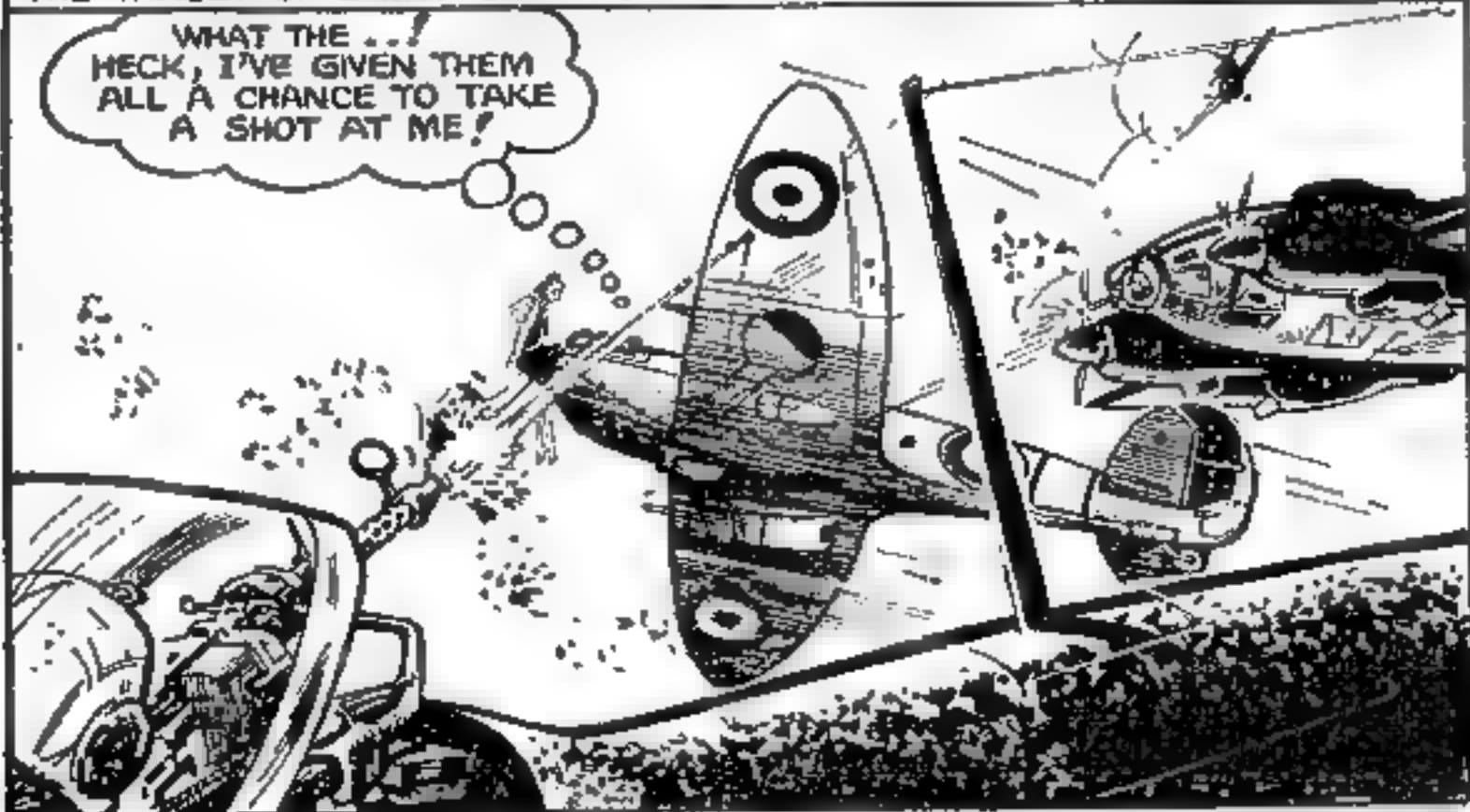
CONVINCED DEATH WAS STARING HIM IN THE FACE, THE GERMAN HEINKEL PILOT BRACED HIMSELF . . . ONLY TO HEAVE A SIGH OF RELIEF, SECONDS LATER . . .

THE ENGLANDER
IS TOO SLOW! TODAY
FATE IS ON MY
SIDE!

NO . . . TOO
LATE, DARN IT!
HE'S OUT OF MY
SIGHTS!

WITHOUT THINKING, THE FIGHTER PILOT JERKED BACK ON THE STICK, AND AS HIS SPITFIRE ROARED CLOSE OVER THE BOMBER FORMATION, IT BECAME THE TARGET OF EVERY GERMAN GUN THAT COULD BE BROUGHT TO BEAR!

WHAT THE ...!
HECK, I'VE GIVEN THEM
ALL A CHANCE TO TAKE
A SHOT AT ME!



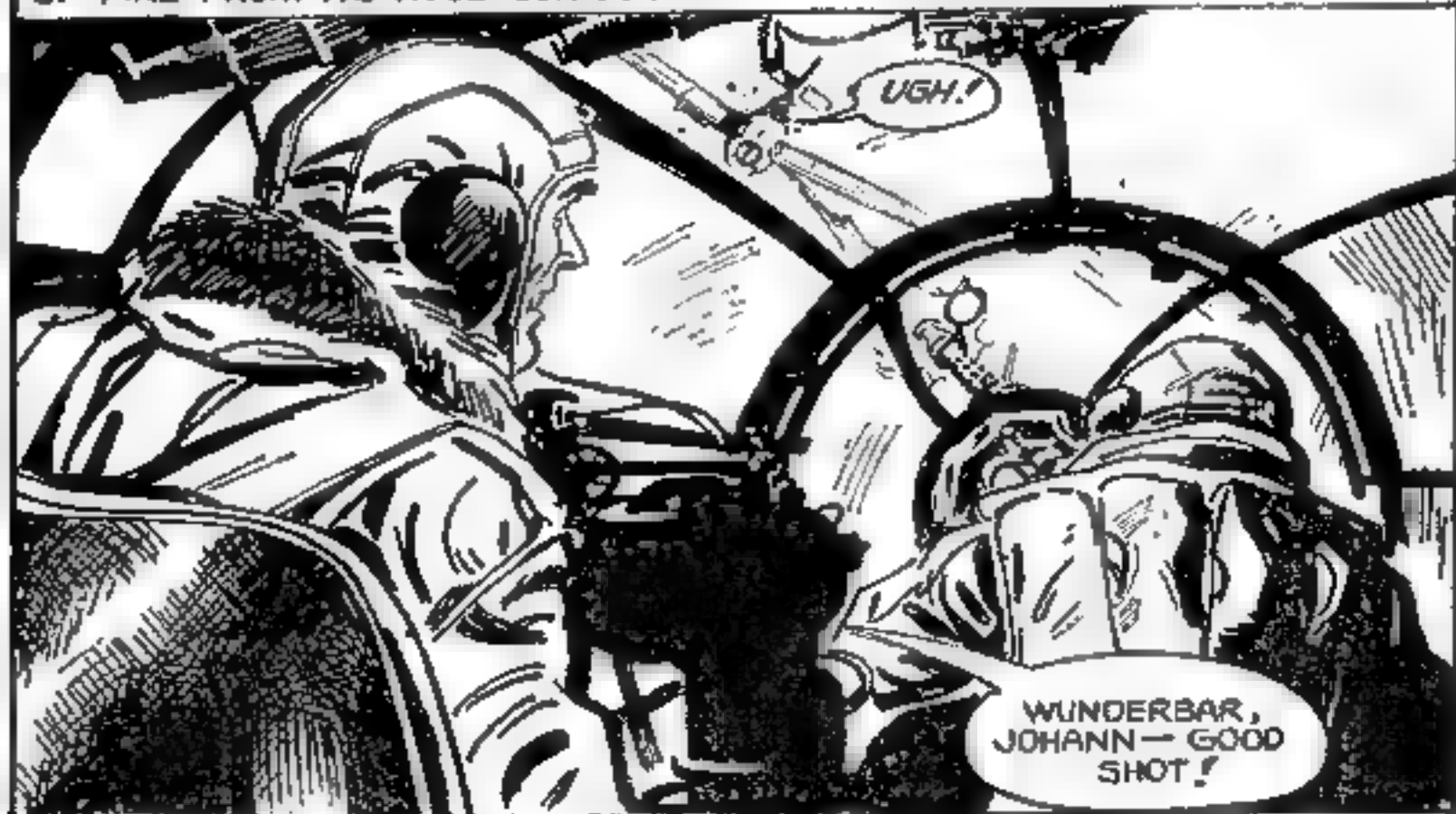
THE SQUADRON LEADER HAD WATCHED THE PILOT'S UNSKILFUL MANOEUVRES. HE HAD DECIDED THAT IT WOULD BE SUICIDAL FOR THE YOUNG PILOT TO CONTINUE THE ATTACK...

LEADER TO RED SEVEN.
BREAK CONTACT AND
RETURN TO BASE.

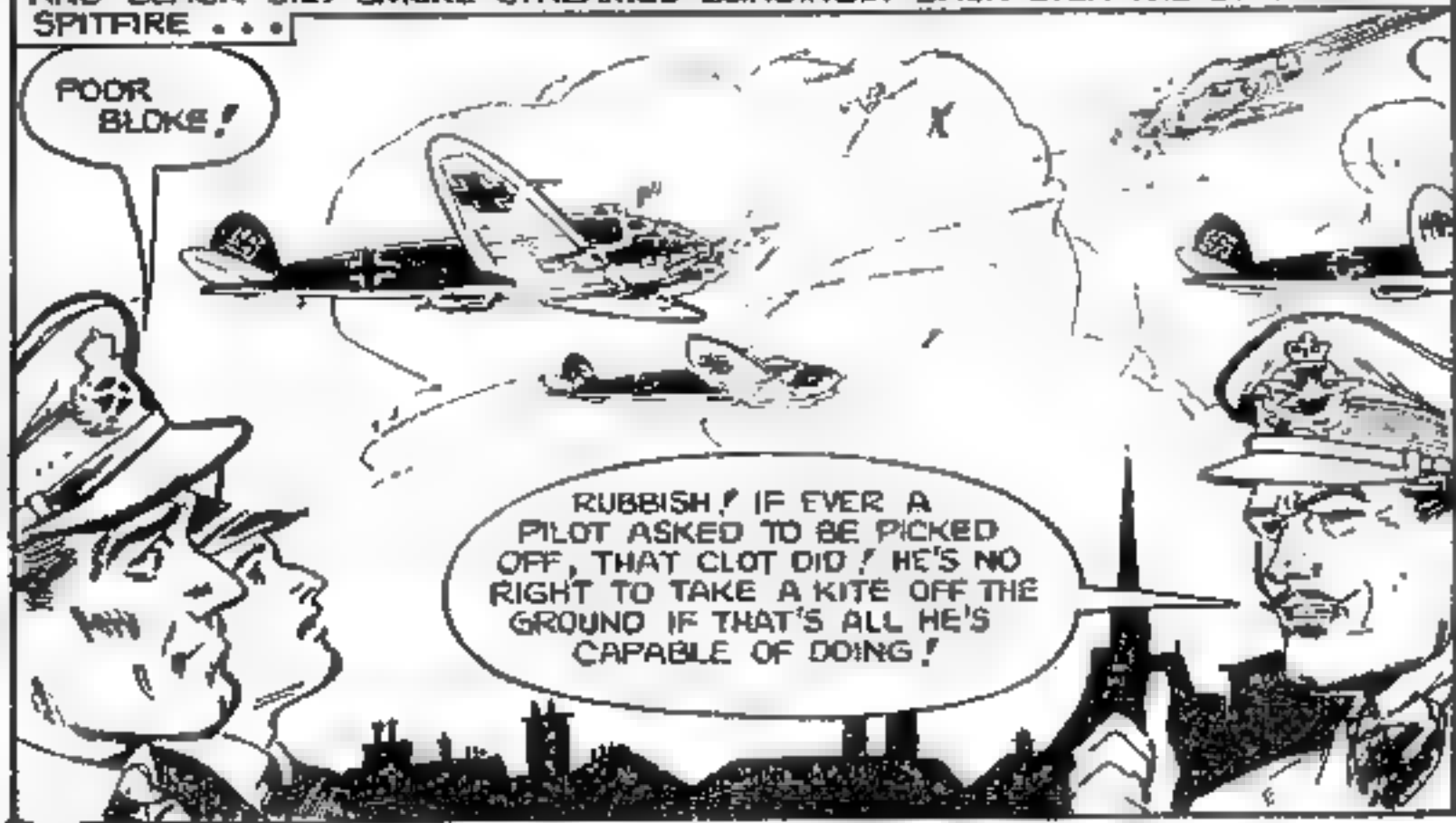
I CAN'T
BREAK CONTACT
NOW! I'VE GOT TO
GET ONE OF THE
HEINKELS...



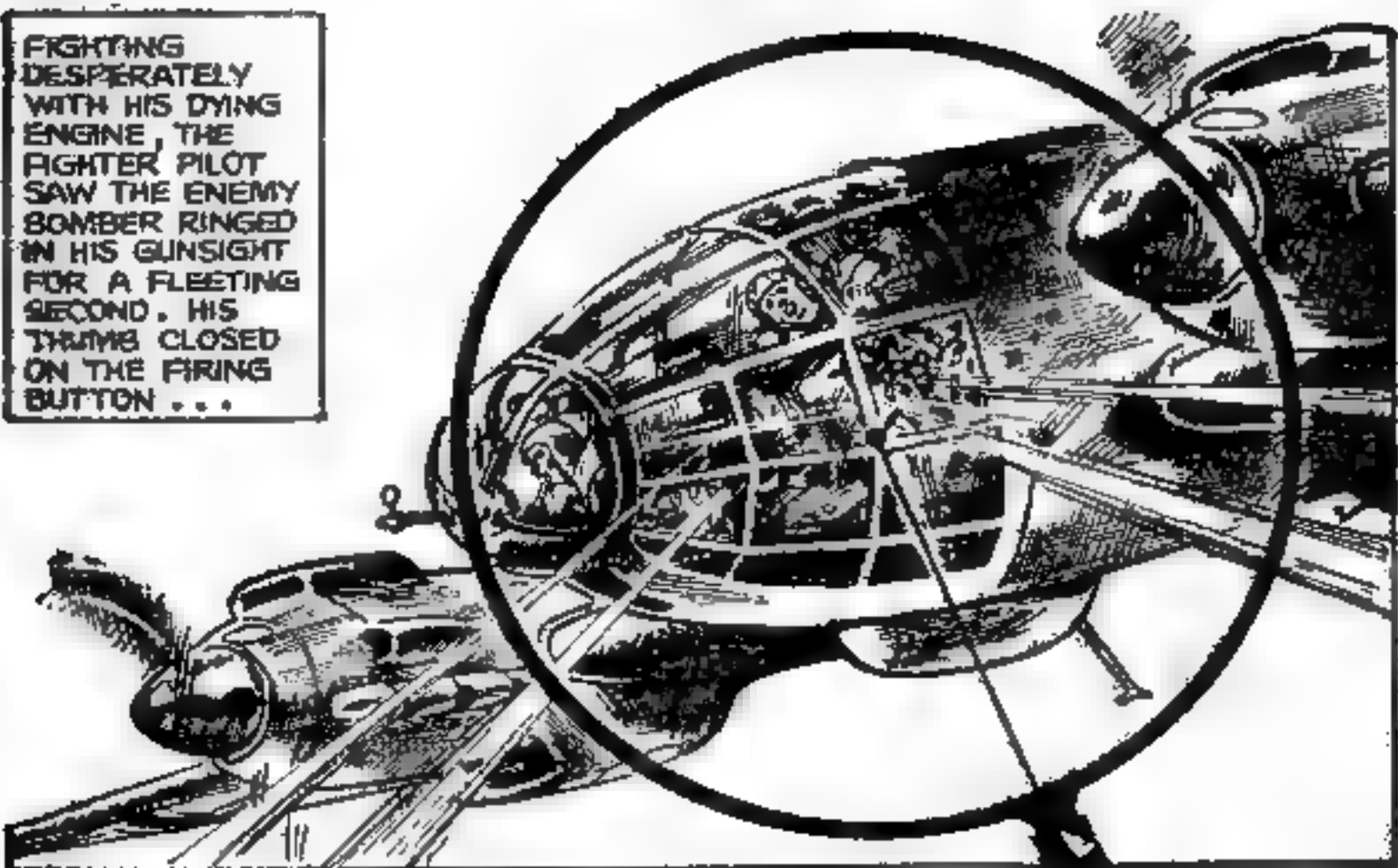
SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE GERMAN BOMBERS SPAT A VICIOUS STREAM OF FIRE FROM ITS NOSE GUN ...



THERE WAS A SUDDEN, DULL EXPLOSION. ORANGE TONGUES OF FLAME AND BLACK OILY SMOKE STREAMED BLINDINGLY BACK OVER THE STRICKEN SPITFIRE ...

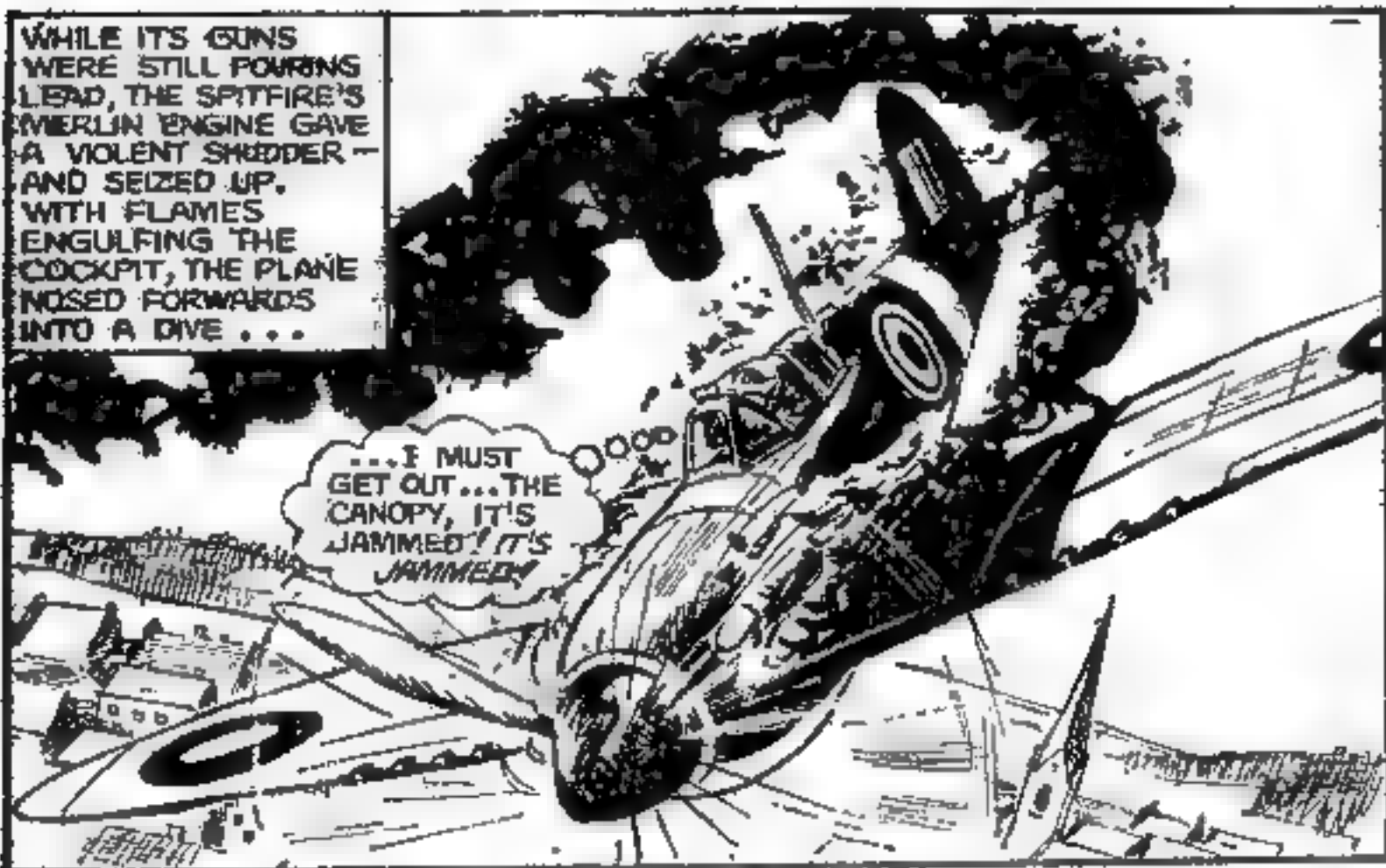


FIGHTING
DESPERATELY
WITH HIS DYING
ENGINE, THE
FIGHTER PILOT
SAW THE ENEMY
BOMBER RINGED
IN HIS GUNSIGHT
FOR A FLEETING
SECOND. HIS
THUMB CLOSED
ON THE FIRING
BUTTON . . .



WHILE ITS GUNS
WERE STILL POURING
LEAD, THE SPITFIRE'S
MERLIN ENGINE GAVE
A VIOLENT SHEDDER—
AND SEIZED UP.
WITH FLAMES
ENGULFING THE
COCKPIT, THE PLANE
NOSED FORWARDS
INTO A DIVE . . .

...I MUST
GET OUT...THE
CANOPY, IT'S
JAMMED! IT'S
JAMMED!



BUT THE DOOMED SPITFIRE'S LAST BURST HAD TAKEN ITS TOLL. THE GERMAN PILOT SLUMPED OVER HIS CONTROLS AND THE BOMBER, TOO, BEGAN ITS FINAL DESCENT...



THROUGH VEILS OF PAIN, THE GERMAN PILOT FOUGHT AGAINST UNCONSCIOUSNESS AS HE PITCHED HIS EBBING STRENGTH AGAINST THE BUCKING CONTROLS...

PULL HER OUT OF THE DIVE, GORTZMANN! LEVEL OUT!

JETTISON THE BOMBS... I'LL TRY TO CRASH LAND...

THE GROUP OF OBSERVERS OUTSIDE THE HOTEL HAD FALLEN SILENT AS THEY WATCHED THE BITTER STRUGGLE. SUDDENLY THEY BECAME AWARE OF DANGER, AS THE JETTISONED GERMAN BOMBS CAME HURTLING DOWN . . .

THE SPIT'S HAD IT! WHY THE HECK DOESN'T THE PILOT JUMP WHILE HE'S GOT THE CHANCE?

LOOK OUT!
THE HEINKEL'S
DROPPED ITS
LOAD!

THE GROUND UNDER THEIR FEET SEEMED TO TREMBLE AS A VIOLENT EXPLOSION RENT THE AIR FROM TWO STREETS AWAY...



REALISING THAT THE BOMBS MUST HAVE FALLEN CLOSE BY, THORNTON BECAME GRAVELY WORRIED.

PHIEW! THAT WAS CLOSE. HOPE YOUR PARENTS ARE OKAY, THORNTON. THEY LIVE SOMEWHERE OVER THAT WAY, DON'T THEY?

GOOD GRIEF! I MUST FIND OUT IF THEY'RE ALL RIGHT...

THE MAN WHO FACED DEATH MANY TIMES A DAY IN THE SKY WITH A SMILE, GAVE WAY TO PANIC AS FEAR WELLED UP IN HIM...

THORNTON! WAIT! I'LL GET THE OTHERS IN CASE YOU NEED HELP...

CAN'T WAIT... I MUST FIND OUT!

DESPERATELY, THORNTON POUNDED DOWN THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS ROADS TOWARDS THE BOMBED HOUSES.

CAN'T MAKE OUT FOR SURE WHICH HOUSE IT IS... MUST GO FASTER...

A SUPERHUMAN BURST OF SPEED BROUGHT HIM ROUND THE CORNER. AS HIS ANXIOUS EYES SCANNED THE ROAD, HORROR FROZE EVERY MUSCLE IN HIS BODY...

MUST 'AVE BEEN INCENDIARIES. THE PLACE IS GOING UP LIKE MATCHWOOD!

OH NO!

GENTLY BUT FIRMLY, STRONG HANDS PREVENTED THE ALMOST BERSERK YOUNG MAN FROM PLUNGING INTO THE FLAMING INFERNO...

MY PARENTS ARE IN THERE... DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND — LET ME GO!

STEADY, BOY— THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO. THERE'S NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO FOR THEM, POOR SOULS...

NUMB WITH GRIEF AND SHOCK, THORNTON SANK DOWN ON TO A LOW WALL...



I'M MORE SORRY THAN I CAN SAY, LAD. YOUR PARENTS WERE GOOD FRIENDS TO MY WIFE AND ME.

THEY WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN ANYTHING ABOUT IT - THEY WERE KILLED INSTANTLY BY BLAST!

SURROUNDED BY SYMPATHISING FRIENDS, THORNTON COULD BEAR IT NO LONGER. ABRUPTLY HE STOOD UP...

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE...

WHERE ARE YOU GOING? DON'T YOU THINK YOU SHOULD...

IF I STAY HERE I'LL GO CRAZY. I'M GOING TO TAKE A LOOK AT THAT SPITFIRE!

BEFORE THE OTHERS COULD STOP HIM, HE TOOK TO HIS HEELS...

I DON'T KNOW WHAT GOOD HE THINKS HE CAN DO. THE PILOT'S BOUND TO HAVE HAD IT - THAT SPITFIRE CAME DOWN WITH A HECK OF A SMACK!



AS THORNTON PUSHED THROUGH THE CROWD OF ONLOOKERS, THE OTHERS SAW THE BLOOD DRAIN FROM HIS FACE . . .

IT COULDN'T BE . . . SURELY IT COULDN'T BE . . .



BUT EVEN WITH THE SPITFIRE'S FRAME TWISTED AND BLAZING THORNTON KNEW . . . IT WAS HIS OWN PLANE!



STUMBLING FORWARD, THORNTON CLUTCHED THE ARM OF ONE OF THE RESCUERS...

THE PILOT—TELL ME... IS HE...

DEAD, I'M AFRAID! NEVER REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS AFTER WE GOT HIM OUT!



SICK WITH SHAME, HE TURNED AWAY AND STAGGERED BACK THE WAY HE HAD COME...

I WAS SHOUTING MY MOUTH OFF ABOUT THAT PILOT! POOR PINDER WAS TOO INEXPERIENCED TO TACKLE THAT LOT!

YOU MEAN YOU KNEW HIM?





BITTER AND BROODING, HE WANDERED LIKE A SLEEP WALKER THROUGH THE CHARRED AND SMOKING RUIN WHICH HAD BEEN HIS HOME . . .

IT'S A NIGHTMARE / I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF THE TWO PEOPLE WHO MEANT EVERYTHING TO ME - AND OF A FRIEND WHO WAS TRYING TO HELP ME BECAUSE HE ADMRED ME. IT'S HORRIBLE . . .

HANG ON A MINUTE, CHUM . . .

BUT THORNTON WAS OBLIVIOUS TO EVERYTHING BUT HIS OWN GRIEF . . .

HIS MIND STILL OBSESSED WITH THE MISERY AND SHAME HE FELT, THORNTON CLIMBED INTO HIS CAR AND DROVE IT LIKE AN AUTOMATON BACK TOWARDS BASE .



HE REACHED THE CAMP AT DUSK, AND AS HE LEFT HIS CAR,
AN UNBELIEVING SHOUT CUT ACROSS THE DARKNESS . . .



NEWS
TRAVELLED
FAST. IT WAS
NOT LONG
BEFORE
THORNTON
RECEIVED
THE TERSE
SUMMONS
HE HAD
BEEN
EXPECTING . . .

EXCUSE ME,
SIR. SQUADRON
LEADER RUSSELL'S
JUST PHONED HERE.
HE WANTS TO SEE
YOU IN HIS OFFICE
IMMEDIATELY!

WHAT'S COME
OVER HIM? HE'S
USUALLY SUCH
A CHEERFUL
BLOKE!

ALL RIGHT,
THANKS,
TOMKINS!



SQUADRON LEADER RUSSELL LOOKED STERN AND UNFRIENDLY AS THORNTON ENTERED HIS OFFICE . . .

YOU'RE IN TROUBLE, THORNTON! YOU TOOK EXTRA LEAVE AFTER I'D REFUSED PERMISSION — AND A MAN WAS KILLED TAKING YOUR PLACE IN THE SQUADRON!

YES, IT'S ENTIRELY MY FAULT, SIR!

I'VE BEEN PREPARED TO TURN A BLIND EYE TO YOUR IRRESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR SO LONG AS YOU DIDN'T INVOLVE ANYONE ELSE — BUT NOW I'M THROWING THE BOOK AT YOU, THORNTON! YOU'RE UNDER CLOSE ARREST FROM NOW ON, PENDING COURT-MARTIAL. DISMISS!

YES, SIR!

Chapter 4. *Wings of Vengeance*

THORNTON SPENT A SLEEPLESS NIGHT IN THE GUARD-ROOM. WHEN DAWN CAME, HE WAS STILL SITTING DEJECTED AND ASHAMED ...

IT'S NO GOOD. I CAN'T EAT!

TRY AND EAT SOMETHING, SIR—IT WON'T HELP YOU TO GO HUNGRY!

FILLED WITH PITY FOR THE HAGGARD-FACED PILOT, THE GUARD TRIED TO DRAW HIM INTO CONVERSATION AND HELP WILE AWAY THE LONG HOURS ...

BIG FLAP ON THIS MORNING, SIR! A WHACKING GREAT FORMATION OF JERRY BOMBERS AND ESCORTS HAS BEEN SPOTTED OVER THE CHANNEL!


BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS, EH? THAT'S GOING TO TAKE SOME BREAKING UP!

WITH A GLIMMER OF HIS OLD DETERMINATION BACK IN HIS EYES, THORNTON REQUESTED PERMISSION TO SPEAK TO HIS SQUADRON LEADER ...

... I GIVE YOU MY WORD TO REPORT BACK TO THE GUARD-ROOM AFTER I LAND, SIR. YOU'RE GOING TO NEED EVERY MAN YOU CAN LAY YOUR HANDS ON FOR A RAID OF THIS SIZE!

NO GOOD, THORNTON. I CAN'T LET YOU FLY WHEN YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!


IT HAD BEEN A SHOT IN THE DARK, BUT THORNTON HAD BANKED HIS HOPES ON IT. DEJECTEDLY, HE SANK BACK ON TO HIS BUNK . . .



I'LL GO BONKERS STAYING COOPED UP IN HERE, WAITING FOR THEM TO TAKE OFF. IF ONLY I COULD THINK OF SOME WAY TO . . .

A FEW SECONDS LATER, WITH DECEPTIVE CASUALNESS, THORNTON SWUNG HIS LEGS OFF THE BUNK AND SAT UP . . .

I SUPPOSE I'LL HAVE TO FACE UP TO THINGS. IT'S NO GOOD THROWING A FIT OF TEMPERAMENT. LET'S HAVE A GAME OF CRIB - IT'LL HELP KEEP US BOTH AMUSED!



THAT'S BETTER, SIR - IT DOESN'T DO TO LET THINGS GET YOU DOWN.

WITHIN TEN MINUTES, THE PAIR OF THEM WERE ENGROSSSED IN THEIR GAME . . .



THORNTON CRASHED THE GLASS WATER-JUG HARD AGAINST HIS HEAD. THE GUARD SAGGED AT THE KNEES . . .



HEAVING THE UNCONSCIOUS MAN BACK INTO THE CHAIR, THORNTON PUSHED HIM UP AGAINST THE WALL. SATISFIED THAT A QUICK LOOK THROUGH THE DOOR WOULD NOT BETRAY THE TRUTH, HE HEAPED THE BEDCLOTHES ON HIS BUNK TO SIMULATE A SLEEPING FIGURE . . .

THAT SHOULD FOOL ANYONE FROM A DISTANCE! NOW COMES THE TRICKY BIT!



WITH THE GUARD'S REVOLVER CLUTCHED IN HIS HAND AS A PRECAUTION, THORNTON TOOK A CAUTIOUS LOOK AROUND OUTSIDE . . .

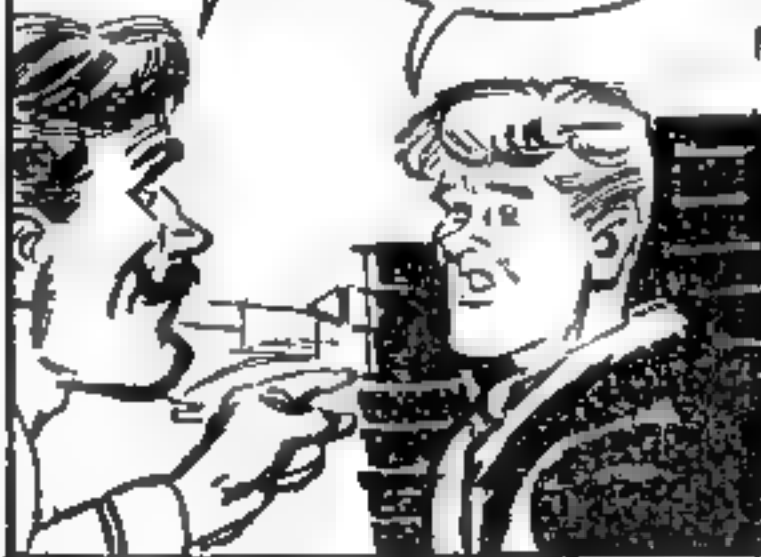
DARN IT! BAXTER'S BEATEN ME TO IT! I'LL HAVE TO GET HIM TO CHANGE PLACES WITH ME, SOMEHOW!



STUFFING THE REVOLVER OUT OF SIGHT, THORNTON WALKED A LITTLE FARTHER TOWARDS THE THROBBING SPITFIRE . . .

HEY, BAXTER—WE'RE SWITCHING PLACES. LAST MINUTE DECISION!

FIRST I'VE HEARD ABOUT IT! I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE IN CLINK! I'LL WAIT TILL I'M GIVEN THE WORD BY THE C.O. HIMSELF!



WHIPPING OUT THE REVOLVER, THORNTON BROUGHT THE BUTT DOWN SQUARELY ON BAXTER'S SKULL AS THE SUSPICIOUS YOUNG PILOT SWUNG BACK IMPATIENTLY TOWARDS THE WAITING PLANE . . .

I HAVEN'T GOT TIME TO WASTE NOW... UGH!

SORRY, CHUM—BUT I'M PROBABLY DOING YOU A FAVOUR...



KEEPING LOW TO MAKE AS SMALL A SILHOUETTE AS POSSIBLE, THORNTON DRAGGED THE PROSTRATE BAXTER BEHIND A CONCEALING FILE OF OIL-DRUMS . . .

I RECKON I'LL HAVE MORE NEED OF A FLYING JACKET THAN HE WILL . . .



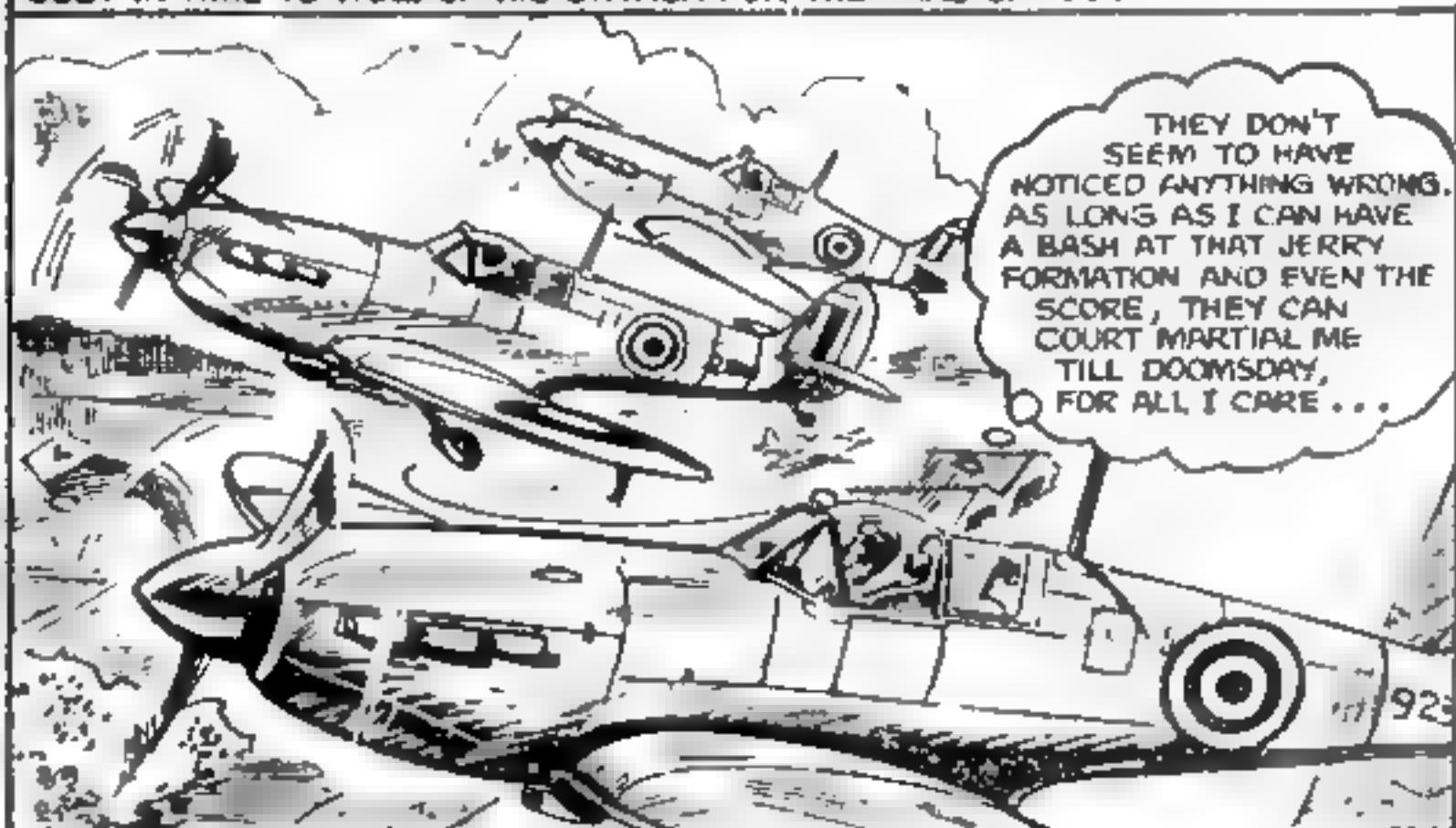
THORNTON RACED TO THE MACHINE TO FIND THE MECHANICS ALREADY HAD THE ENGINE WARMED UP AND TICKING OVER GENTLY. THEY LOOKED AT HIM WITH SOME ASTONISHMENT . . .

WHERE'S FLYING OFFICER BAXTER, SIR?

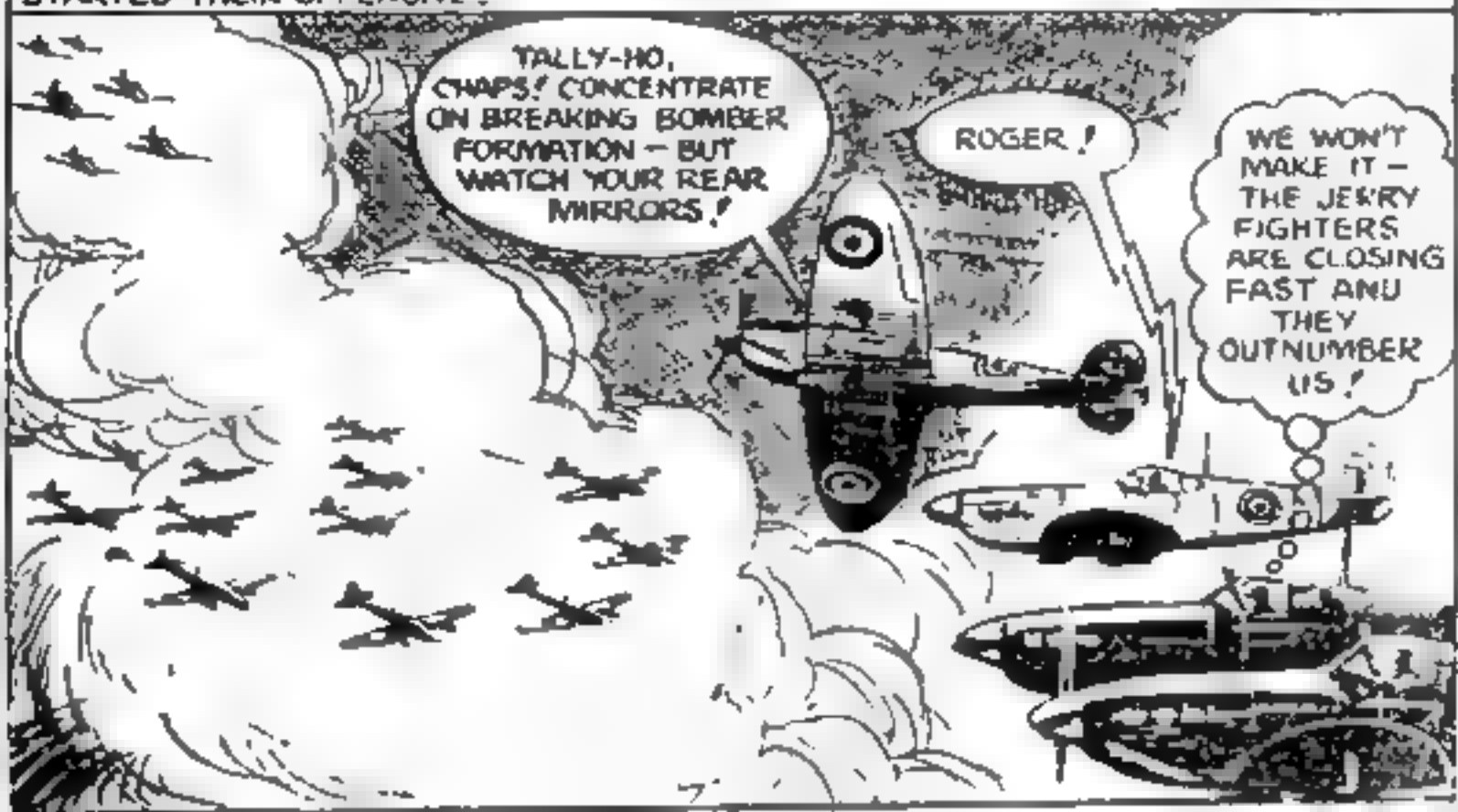
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW, MAN—I WANT TO GET OFF!



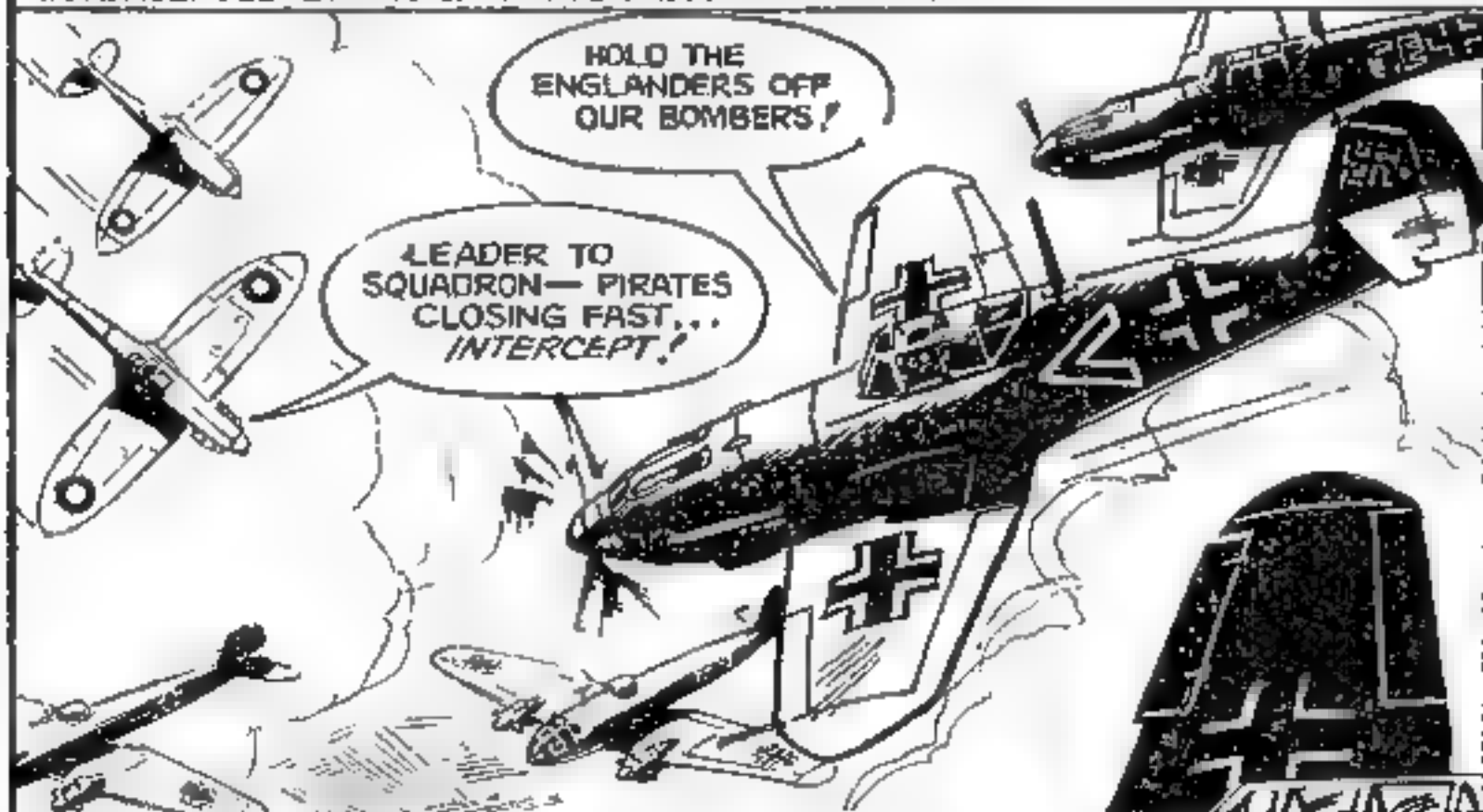
SCRAMBLING INTO THE COCKPIT, HE MANAGED TO GET THE SPITFIRE ROLLING JUST IN TIME TO TAKE UP HIS STATION FOR THE TAKE-OFF ...



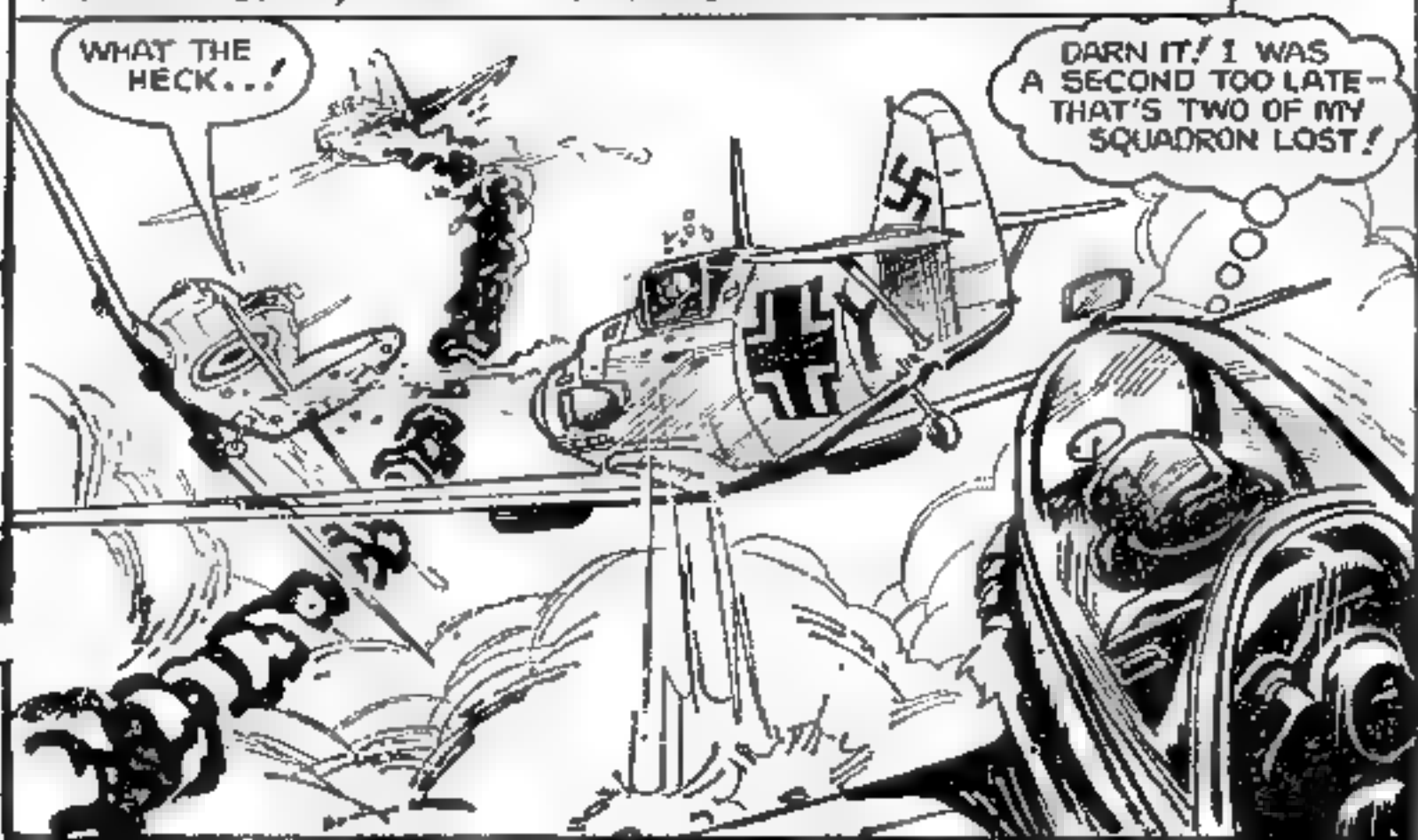
DIRECTED BY GROUND CONTROL, THE SQUADRON SOON LOCATED THE BOMBER FORMATION - THE LARGEST THAT THE LUFTWAFFE HAD SENT OVER SINCE THEY HAD STARTED THEIR OFFENSIVE!



SCREAMING DOWN OUT OF THE SUN, THE SPITFIRES RACED TOWARDS THE BOMBER FORMATION. BUT BEFORE THEY COULD GET WITHIN EFFECTIVE RANGE, THEY WERE INTERCEPTED BY THE SNARLING MESSERSCHMITTS ...



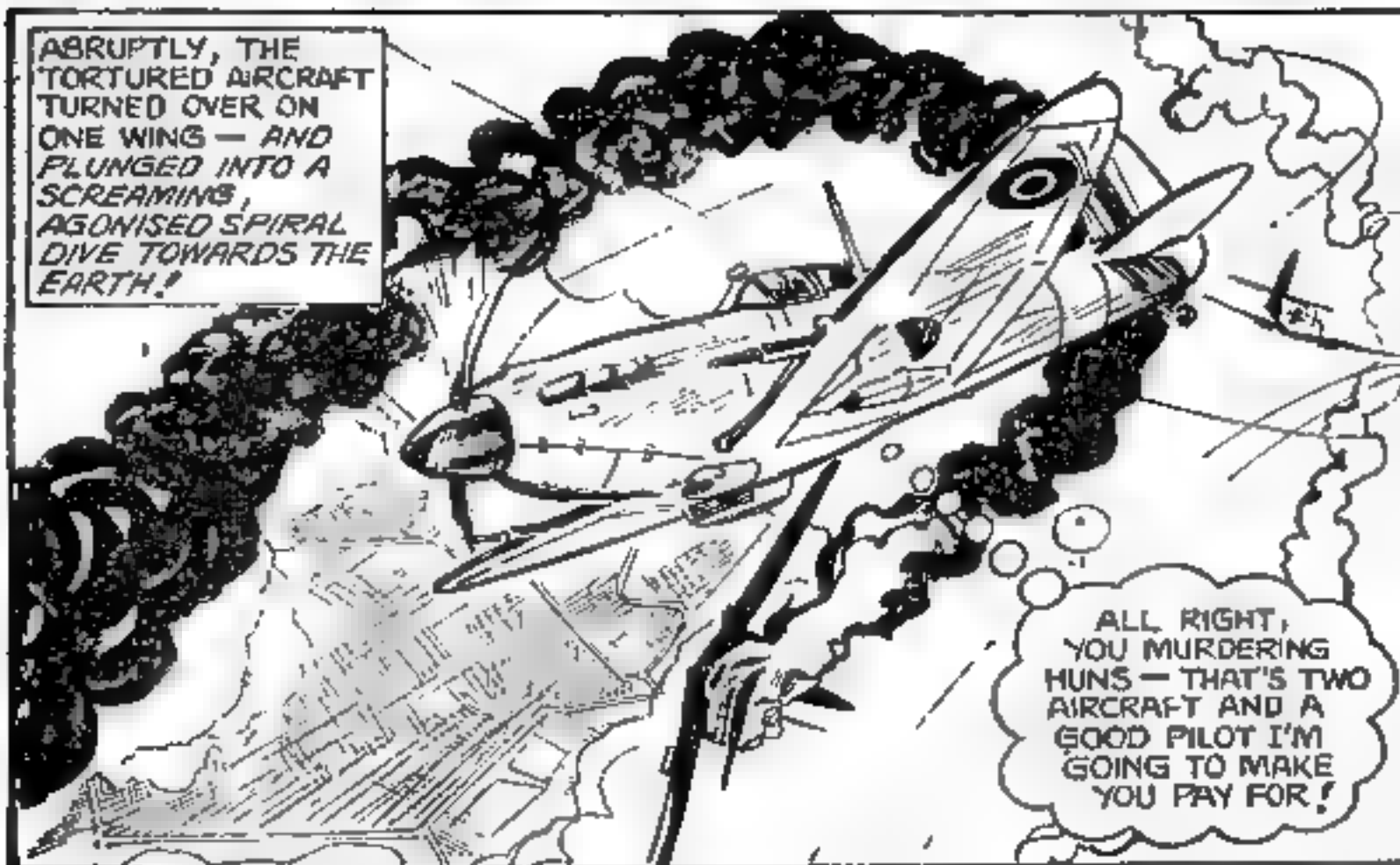
SIMULTANEOUSLY, GERMAN AND ENGLISH FIGHTERS OPENED FIRE ...



THE SECOND PILOT WAS NOT SO FORTUNATE AS HIS COMRADE, NOW FLOATING PEACEFULLY DOWN BY PARACHUTE. HELPLESSLY, RUSSELL WATCHED HIM STRUGGLE DESPERATELY WITH HIS HEAT-WARPED CANOPY. THEN ...



ABRUPTLY, THE TORTURED AIRCRAFT TURNED OVER ON ONE WING — AND PLUNGED INTO A SCREAMING, AGONISED SPIRAL DIVE TOWARDS THE EARTH!



THE NEXT MOMENT THORNTON HEARD RUSSELL'S VOICE, TAUT WITH ANGER, CRACKLE IN HIS EARPHONES . . .

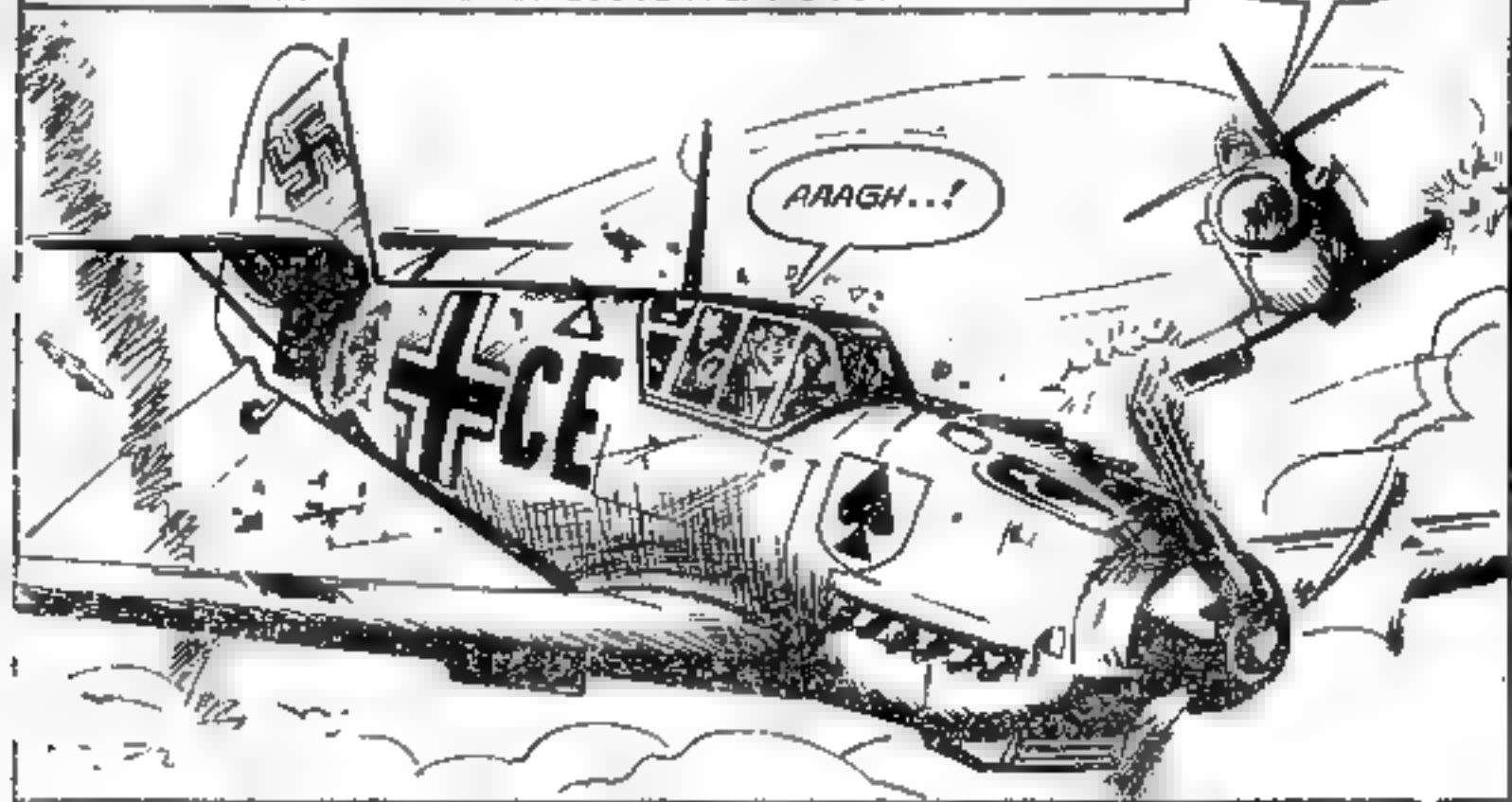
ALL RIGHT, BAXTER—
NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO
EVEN THE SCORE WITH
THAT MESSERSCHMITT.
GOOD LUCK!

DON'T WORRY, CHUM—
I'M GOING TO GIVE THAT
DEVIL THE PASTING
OF HIS LIFE!

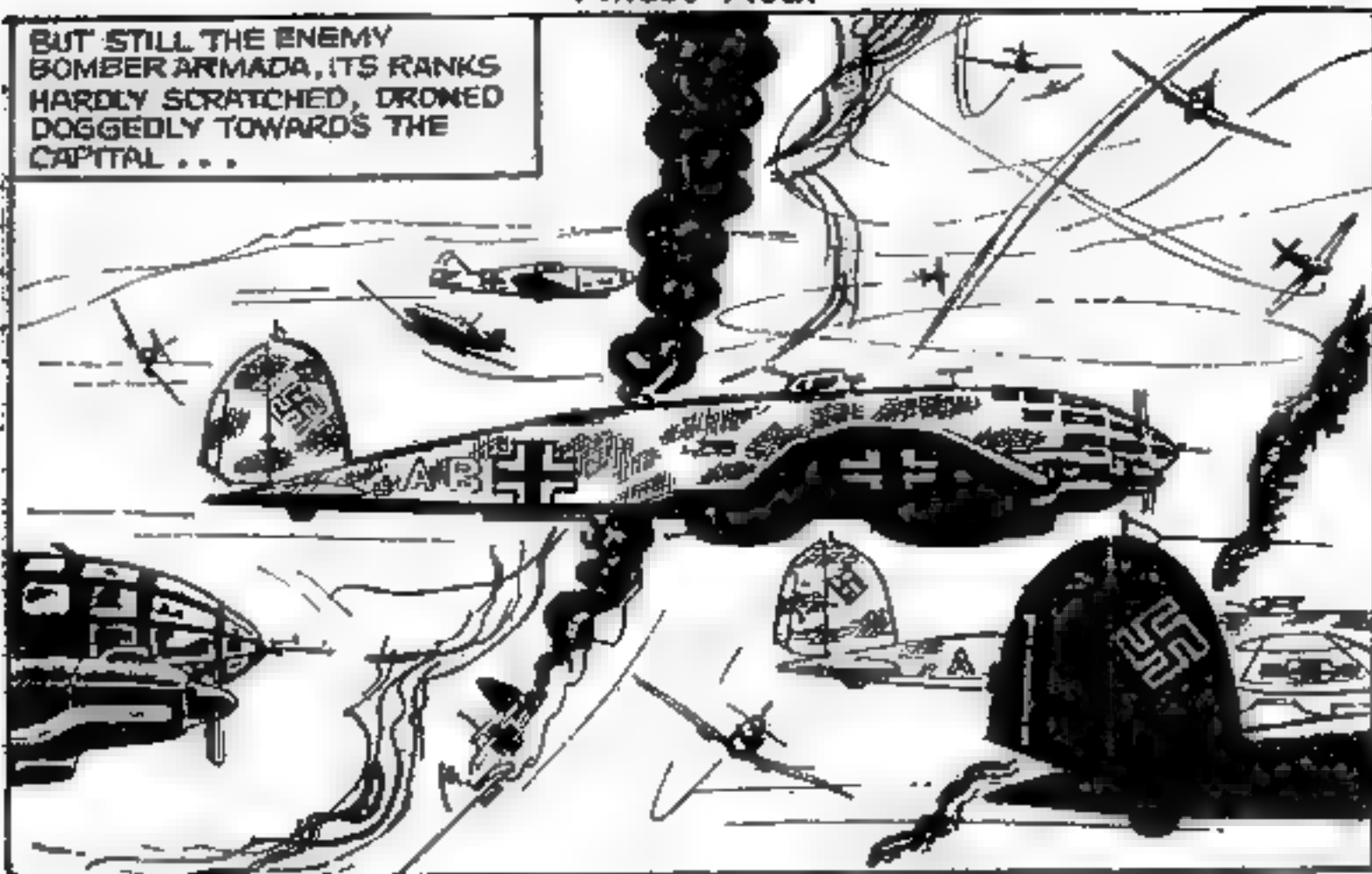
THORNTON CALLED EVERY OUNCE OF SKILL AND CUNNING TO HIS AID. COMING IN AT THE MESSERSCHMITT FROM ITS PORT WING, HE SAW THE FRANTIC PILOT VAINLY TRYING TO WEAVE AND TWIST OUT OF RANGE. THEN HE LET LOOSE A SALVO . . .

HOLD THIS,
FRITZ!

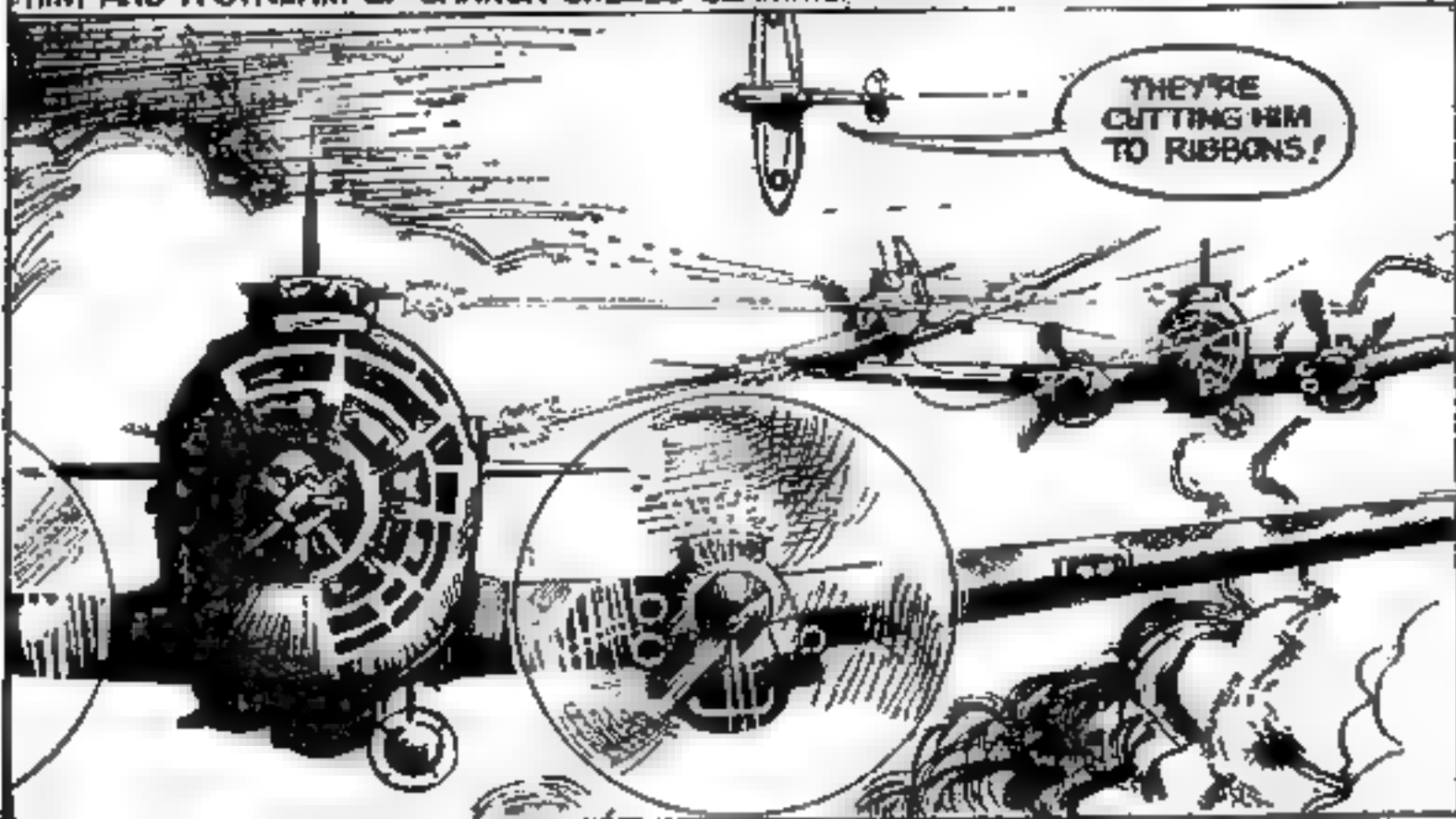
AAAGH...!



BUT STILL THE ENEMY BOMBER ARMADA, ITS RANKS HARDLY SCRATCHED, DRONED DOGGEDLY TOWARDS THE CAPITAL . . .



THORNTON WATCHED AS ONE SPITFIRE MANAGED TO ELUDE THE WATCHFUL FIGHTERS AND APPROACHED AN UNWARY BOMBER. A SECOND HEINKEL CLOSED THE GAP BEHIND HIM AND A STREAM OF CANNON-SHELLS SLAMMED INTO THE PLANE . . .

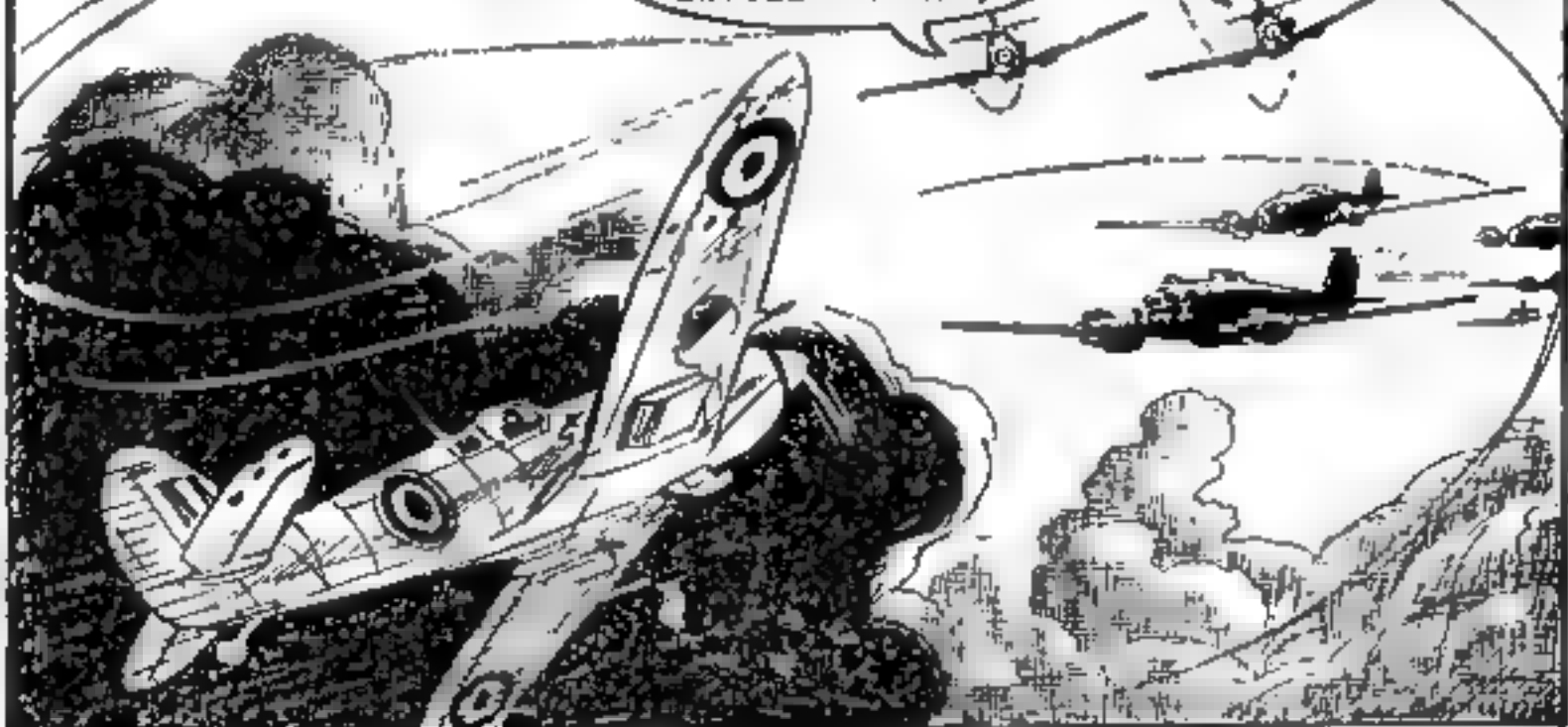


THORNTON RAN THE GAUNTLET OF FIRE FROM THE ESCORTING MESSERSCHMITTS — AND MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVED TO ATTACK THE LEADING HEINKEL HEAD-ON!

WHAT'S BAXTER UP TO NOW?

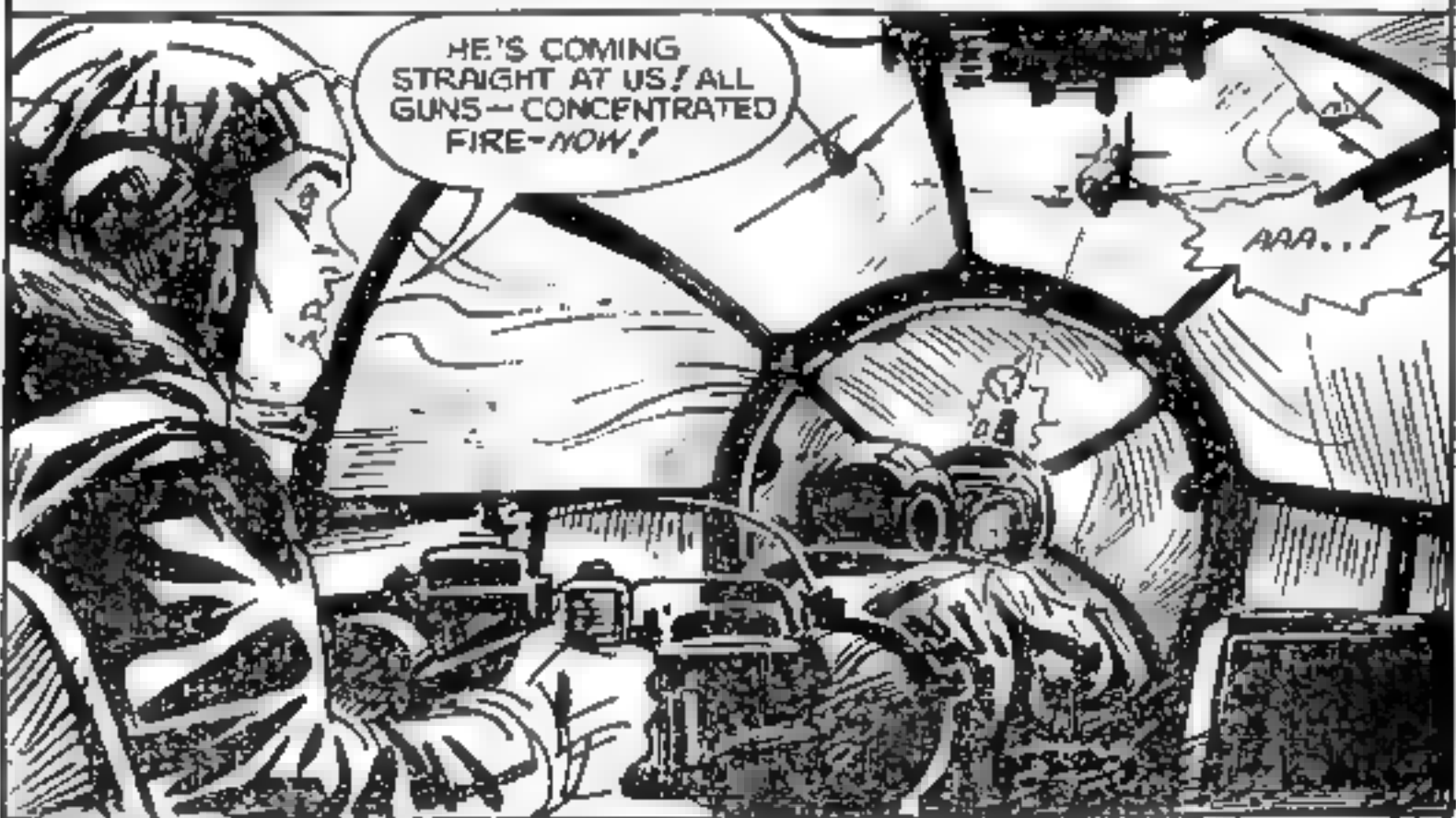
THE ENGLANDER MUST BE MAD! DOES HE IMAGINE ONE FIGHTER CAN TAKE US ON SINGLE-HANDED?

GIVE HIM NO CHANCE TO ATTACK. ALL OUR BOMBS MUST REACH LONDON!



WITH HIS BROWNING'S ERUPTING IN A CONTINUAL, BLISTERING STREAM OF FIRE, THORNTON BRANDED HIS WAY THROUGH THE HEINKELS' FIGHTER-SHIELD...

HE'S COMING STRAIGHT AT US! ALL GUNS — CONCENTRATED FIRE — NOW!



ROCKING BACK WITH THE AGONY OF A WOUNDED SHOULDER, THORNTON
CLENCHED HIS TEETH — AND PRESSED THE FIRING BUTTON!



STILL THE SPITFIRE HELD ITS COURSE . . .

DIVE, MAN,
DIVE!



BUT THORNTON HAD NO INTENTION OF DODGING THE HEINKEL. A SPLIT-SECOND LATER, HIS ROCKETING SPITFIRE SLAMMED STRAIGHT INTO IT!



TOO LATE, THE CLOSE-FLYING FORMATION SAW THEIR DANGER. MOVING FRANTICALLY TO ALL SIDES, THEY TRIED TO AVOID THE LOCKED AND BURNING PLANES...



MIND, YOU FOOL, YOU'LL BE ON US IN... AAGH!

THE WING COMMANDER, WATCHING THE WHOLESALE AERIAL COLLISIONS WITH BLANK AMAZEMENT FROM THE AERODROME, WAS APPROACHED BY A SCARLET-FACED, INDIGNANT YOUNG PILOT...

FLYING OFFICER THORNTON'S BROKEN OUT OF THE GUARD ROOM, SIR. HE KNOCKED ME DOWN AND TOOK MY PLACE IN THE SQUADRON!

SO THAT'S WHO'S IN THAT SPITFIRE!



BUT HOW D'YOU
KNOW THAT'S HIM,
SIR? IT COULD BE
ANY ONE OF THE
PILOTS...

ONLY THORNTON WOULD HAVE FLOWN WITH
SUCH DISREGARD FOR HIS OWN SAFETY. RUSSELL
ONCE SAID THAT HE WAS IRRESPONSIBLE - BUT,
WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PINDER'S DEATH ON HIS
CONSCIENCE, HE DELIBERATELY SACRIFICED HIMSELF
TO BREAK THAT NAZI FORMATION, AND SAVED
HUNDREDS OF LONDONERS' LIVES!

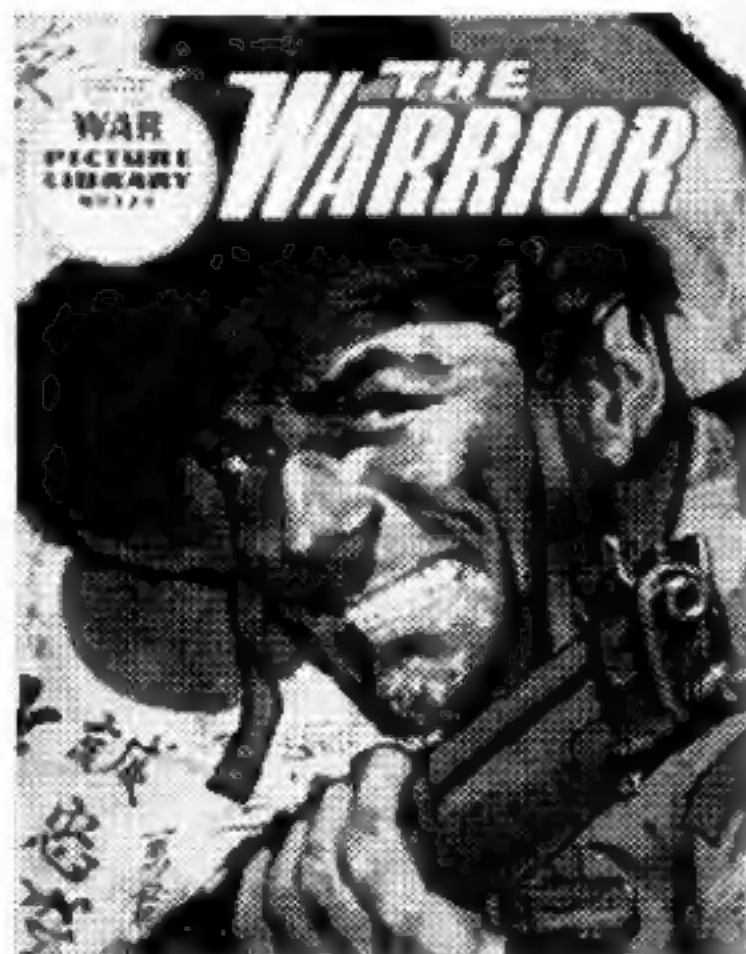


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ALSO ON SALE NOW :—

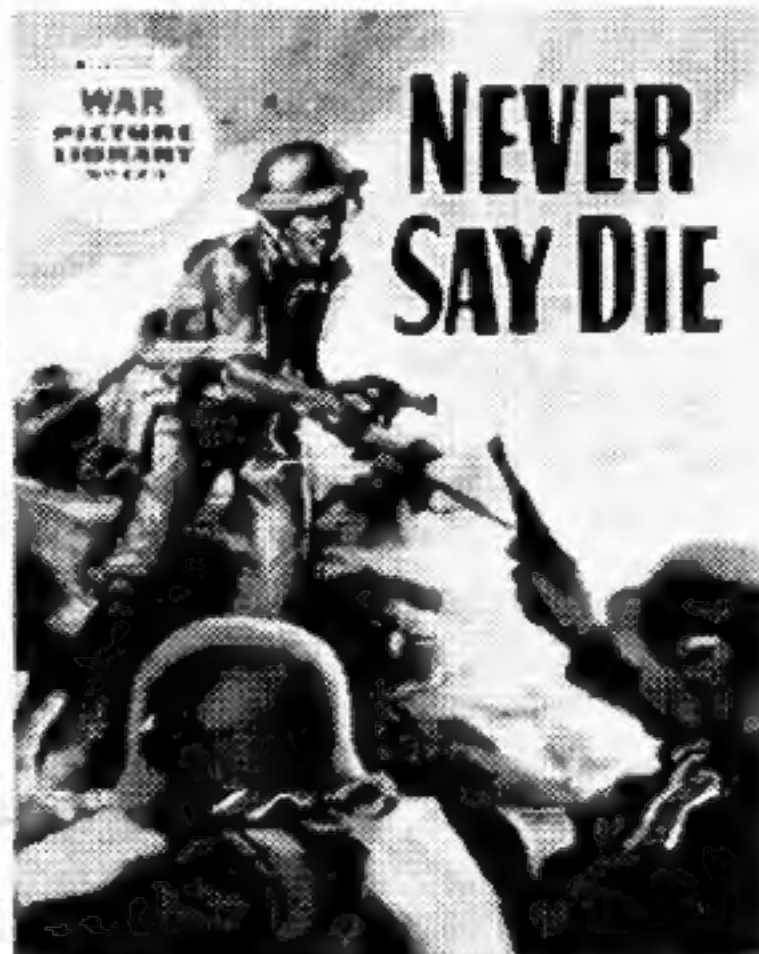
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Next month's **FOUR** thrilling **WAR PICTURE LIBRARY** issues, on sale 7th January, are :—

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VERANO**

No. 177—ACTION FRONT

No. 174—NEVER SAY DIE



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No. 178—PACT OF DEATH

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